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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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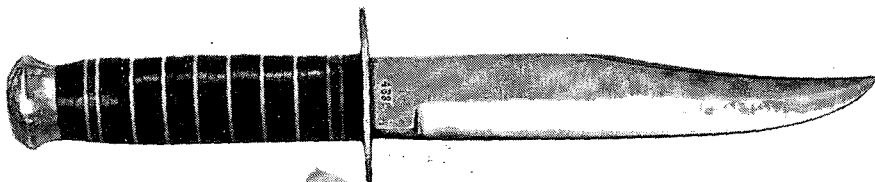
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

One of the highlights of Bouchercon (the annual mystery convention for writers and readers) is the presentation of the Shamus awards by the Private Eye Writers of America for the best fiction involving private eyes written in the preceding year. It has become a traditional event for the Saturday afternoon of the three-day conference, held in October every year, and Bouchercon XVI, which met in San Francisco this time around, was no exception. The complete list of nominees follows, with the names of the winners in bold face:

BEST HARDCOVER PRIVATE EYE NOVEL IN 1984:

***Sugartown* by Loren D. Estleman (Houghton Mifflin)**

*True Crime* by Max Allan Collins (St. Martin's)

*Die Again, Macready* by Jack Livingston (St. Martin's)

*Nightlines* by John Lutz (St. Martin's)

*Full Contact* by Robert J. Randisi (St. Martin's)

BEST PAPERBACK PRIVATE EYE NOVEL IN 1984:

***Ceiling of Hell* by Warren Murphy (Fawcett)**

*Squeeze Play* by Paul Benjamin (Avon)

*San Quentin* by Jack Lynch (Warner)

*Trace and 47 Miles of Rope* by Warren Murphy (NAL)

*The Man Who Risked His Partner* by Reed Stephens (Ballantine)

BEST FIRST PRIVATE EYE NOVEL IN 1984:

***A Creative Kind of Killer* by Jack Early (Franklin Watts)**

*Blunt Darts* by Jeremiah Healy (Walker)

*The Nebraska Quotient* by William J. Reynolds (St. Martin's)

BEST PRIVATE EYE SHORT STORY IN 1984:

**"By the Dawn's Early Light" by Lawrence Block (*Playboy*, August 1984, and *The Eyes Have It*, Mysterious Press)**

"Easy Money" by John Boland (*EQMM*, April 1984)



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"Iris" by Stephen Greenleaf  
(*The Eyes Have It*)

"The Rat Line" by Rob  
Kantner (*The Eyes Have It*)

"The Big Winners" by Ernest  
Savage (EQMM, September  
1984)

Congratulations to them all, of course, but especially to Loren Estleman—who, as it happens, has a new Amos Walker short story in this issue of AHMM (see "Major Crimes") and who was profiled by Mary Cannon in the January issue. We are also particularly glad to see William Reynolds, John Lutz, Rob Kantner, and Ernest Savage honored with nominations, all of them writers whose stories have appeared in our pages.

Coming up soon... a new mystery weekend, this one in Connecticut. The Hotel Stamford Plaza in Stamford is host-

ing a return to the Rose Bowl game in 1941 in Pasadena, featuring private eye Philip Marlowe, on May 16, 17, and 18. For reservations (the price is \$190), call 1-800-231-2042; Connecticut residents should call 1-800-247-8180.

Finally, many of you may remember Barbara Ninde Byfield's delightful "A Cast of Characters," printed in our August 1983 issue. In that feature, Ms. Byfield delineated, in words as well as through her drawings, some typical characters in a classic English mystery story. In this issue, she is back with another—more sinister—set of folks, the Seven Deadly Sins themselves. Together with their favorite habits, foods, haunts, and methods of murder. Appropriate, we thought, for our pages: after all, these fellows do seem to have something to do with crime!

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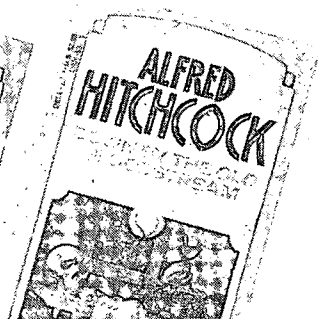
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# The Undertaker's Wedding

by Chet Williamson

**I**t's a shame you children never knew your grandpa. Oh, he was such a gentle man. Problem was, people confused his gentleness with sneakiness, I couldn't tell you why. Maybe not sneakiness exactly, but more like cowering, is that the word? Like a cowed animal always looking for somebody to hit it. He was shy, that was all, and gentle. And because of that people thought he was less than he was. Why, in other towns you'd have your undertakers being well thought of, town council members, maybe even mayors like over in Willow Creek, even if it *was* just for two years. But not here in town, not for Grandpa.

Illustration by Glenn Wolff

I suspect some folks thought he never should've been an undertaker, quiet and shy as he was. Nowadays so many undertakers are big, hearty, happy men with red faces and big hands that grab you when you shake 'em, like what they're doing had nothing to do with death. Oh, at the funerals they look serious and make their mouths go straight, but on the street you'd think they were salesmen from how most of them act.

Grandpa, he wasn't like that. He was gentle. He said to me once that his were the last hands to touch them on the earth, and he wanted their last memories of this place to be good because if they went to Heaven they might tell the Lord of the kindnesses they'd had here and He might not be so hard on us. If they went to the other place, well, then those poor souls'd value Grandpa's last kindnesses all the more. In fact, he said it was the bad 'uns needed his gentleness most of all, since they'd most of them had so little shown to them when they were alive.

But nobody knew he thought like that, not even me. Oh, I giggled with the other girls, and as hard as any of 'em when he'd walk by on the street, or when he sat near some of us in church. Only in church, of course, we couldn't giggle, could only make little faces at each other. It *was* funny at first, and a little scary. Sometimes we'd giggle loud just so's he could hear us, and he'd stick his head down between his shoulders and scurry away. And maybe one of the girls would say, "You better not let him hear you laugh, or he'll come to your house some night and *drag you away!*" And surely that'd make us giggle all the more, at the thought of the quiet, creepy old undertaker trying to do that, when we knew he'd jump if you said boo to him. It wasn't *him* that made it scary, but what he did when we'd think about it, burying people, getting them all ready and having to undress them and wash them and dress them and put them in their coffins. It didn't seem nice, it just seemed scary. And that's why, even when we were laughing, we still felt a little funny, leastways I did.

I don't like to say that I was special or any nicer, but after a while it wasn't much fun for me to laugh at him at all. It didn't seem right somehow, or maybe I just grew up a little faster than the others. But one May day we were all coming out of the soda parlor on Market Street—it's long gone now—and he was walking by. Well, some of the others started to giggle, and he turned red right off. And I just thought, he looks so nice, and he did, with a pressed white shirt and dark trousers and a pretty blue bow tie,



his hair just so, like he'd come from the barber shop, and I could smell some nice aftershave lotion that smelled so cool in that hot sun. So I shushed the others real sharp, and they shut up fast. But the shush I made was so loud it startled him, and he stopped dead in his tracks and just looked at me like I'd been shushing him. He looked in that second just like a little boy looking up at his ma, ready to do whatever she asked. But of course I *hadn't* been shushing him, so I just smiled and nodded, not knowing what else to do. Then he smiled, such a tiny little smile like he thought a bigger one would break his face, and he gave a little nod back at me, and kept walking.

Well, the other girls had a heyday with that. They giggled at first, then when he was gone they laughed fit to bust, and started singing, "Emmy's got a boyfriend, Emmy's got a boyfriend," and dancing in a circle around me. Then they laughed some more, and one of them said, "You be careful, Emmy, I hear he got real *cold* hands." I just got mad then and walked away, deciding I wasn't going to make no more fun of him. Why, he'd *smiled* at me, and smiled real nice, too.

The next time I saw the girls, they acted funny, like I might be mad at them. I was a little, I guess, but they said no more about the day before and neither did I, so we were friends again, and I sort of forgot about the whole thing.

That's why it was a big surprise, a few days later, when my daddy told me the undertaker'd come to see him in the store where he clerked, and asked for permission to come calling on me. Surprise, did I say? Why, I fairly flew into a frazzle when I heard, and when my daddy told me he'd said it was all right, I near cried. "Now, Emmy," my daddy said, patting my shoulder, "don't take on so. He's just coming to call, nothing more. If you don't like him, you don't have to see him again, I promise." I guess I must have looked pretty scared, because he went on. "He's a good man, Emmy. A quiet man, but a good'un."

I just nodded. He was coming Friday night, and I didn't say nothing to my chums about it, didn't want them to find out if I could help it. That day I was so nervous I couldn't eat a bite for supper; just sat at the table and watched my mother and daddy eat. Mother looked near as scared as me, though she was getting some food down. Only my daddy seemed like normal, and he'd look at me and give me a smile that told me not to worry, but I did, and I don't really know about what.

Along about seven o'clock he came up the walk, carrying a bunch

of flowers. They were awfully pretty, and I got a little choked up, since this was the first time I'd ever had a caller and flowers, not being one of the prettiest girls in town. But then the idea hit me so queer, of an undertaker bringing flowers, and I knew it was stupid, but all I could think of was where he'd *got* them from. I still feel bad today when I think of how that nasty thought got into my head, like a harsh word you can never take back. He must have seen what was in my mind when he handed them to me because his face looked like I'd just cut him with a knife, and he was trying hard not to let the pain show. But I made myself smile, and took the flowers, and gave them to Mother, who looked a little queasy as she took them, but I don't think he noticed.

Thank the Lord my daddy had taken the evening off from clerking at the dry goods, for he did most of the talking, asking Grandpa whether he thought that rain was going to come, and what he thought of the Athletics' chances, and whether they'd ever get a dam built up at French Creek. And Grandpa answered him soft and polite. It was the first time I'd ever heard him speak, and I was surprised at what a deep low voice he had, when I'd expected a high little peep. Not that he was small—he was a medium-sized man, I suppose—but he was just so shy and scary that you'd have thought he'd have the same kind of voice. Oh, it was shy, but low and real full, like I thought Lawrence Tibbett would sound if I'd ever heard him talk instead of sing.

After a while of talking, Daddy looked at me and smiled and then looked at my mother and said as how it was time to leave the young folks alone for a spell to get acquainted. Well, that froze me a little, though not as cold as it would've before we'd all chatted for a while. So Mother and Daddy left us alone in our little front parlor and went back into the kitchen, where I could hear Daddy turning the pages of the newspaper and Mother saying things real low every once in a long while.

For the longest time Grandpa and I just sat there, he on the old wing chair, me across the room in a side chair with Mother's needlework on the seat and back. Neither one of us said a word, and finally he cleared his throat and said as how it was a real pleasure to be able to come and call on me, and he was wondering if I enjoyed the moving pictures. I allowed as how I did, and then he asked me if I would be interested in accompanying him—that's the word he used, *accompanying*—to the U.S. Theater the next night to see *The Old Homestead*. He told me it was a very respectable picture, and that Pastor Myers had seen it and said it was very good.

I didn't want to go, not really, but right then and there I was just so flustered that I didn't know how to make up a lie. Boys just didn't ask me out, not even boys I didn't want to go out with, and I had no experience with such things. So I just nodded and said all right, and he got the sweetest, happiest smile on his face that right off I was *glad* I'd said yes. Then he just talked a little more about the movie and took a little handout thing the theater gave away about it and handed it to me to keep, and I allowed that it looked like a good picture and we just sat there again until he remarked how late it was getting, and said he'd best be going. So I called Mother and Daddy out and we all said our goodnights.

After he was gone, I didn't say anything to them and they asked me no questions, just eyed me, my mother worried-looking, Daddy smiling, and I excused myself and went upstairs.

Once I realized what I'd done, I got sort of panicked. I knew that my friends would be at the pictures, some of them anyway, and by next morning it'd be all over town that I'd been out with the undertaker. *Everybody'd* know at the service. And what about the service—would he expect me to sit with him? I had such foolish, awful dreams that night, I can still remember. Dreamt I was at the pictures with Grandpa, but the movie wasn't a real movie—it was Grandpa working, getting the dead ready for burial. And all around me my friends were watching and smiling at me and saying what a fine job he was doing, and though I couldn't bear to watch the screen, I couldn't *not* watch, either. Then Grandpa took my hand in the dark theater, and it was cold, so cold I woke up, to find my own hand grabbing the cool brass bedpost.

Next morning I told my daddy that I'd been asked out and said yes, but I wasn't sure I wanted to go. He said to me, well, you said you would, didn't you? And I allowed as how I had, and he said, well then, you should. Mother took my side, but Daddy said if she said she would, then she should. Next time just say no if you don't want to. You've got a mouth, so start to use it. Then he spoke less sharp and touched a hand to my cheek. He's a kind man, Emmy, he said. He said, he won't hurt you at all, but you be careful so's not to hurt him.

I knew he was right about going, and that night Grandpa came by for me and we went to the pictures. I didn't see anyone I knew when we went in, and I felt ashamed that I was glad of it. The movie was good. It was the first time I ever heard Grandpa laugh, and such a sweet laugh he had, like music. He never touched my

hand once, nor put an arm around me.

When the show was over and the lights came on, I saw Mandy Dawson sitting two rows back with her fellow, looking at me like the cat that just ate the bird, and I knew she'd start spreading the news that very night. There was something in her look that right then made me mad, made me think the hell with what *they* think. I know that's no language for a lady, but that's what went through my head, and when Grandpa asked if I'd like a soda, I smiled and said yes, and we went in the soda parlor and sat at a bright table in front where any nosy parker could see us, and talked about the movie and a lot more, and we *both* smiled that night.

Next morning I sat with him in church, and I think it surprised my mother as much as it did my friends. Oh, they gave me the dirt at first, but once they knew that I'd see who I *wanted* to see, they left me be quick enough. Some of them left me be for good, though my best friends stuck by me—Marion and Doróthy and Katie. In fact, they confessed that they'd always thought Grandpa was sort of cute, no matter what he did.

He and I didn't talk about that for the longest time, even though we started going together regular. He lived above the funeral parlor, and of course I never went over there anyway, that just wasn't done. When we'd have plans to do something, and someone would die and he'd have to hold the service and all, he'd just say he was sorry but we couldn't go to so and so because he was needed. That's what he'd say, he was needed. And I'd know, and it would be all right. But we never talked about it directly. Leastways, not till he asked me to marry him.

We'd been going out together for maybe five months when he'd got up the nerve. It was October, and we'd just been on a hayride with the church, and he was walking me home, and he stopped right on the corner of Orange Street and Washington, and he asked me if I'd consider being his wife. It was pretty chilly that October, but that wasn't why I shivered so. And don't go thinking I shivered because it was the *undertaker* asking me to wed him. I shivered because marrying him had been all I'd been thinking about since we went to the soda parlor after that first picture. I loved that man sure enough, but if you'd told me I'd be feeling that way six months earlier, I'd've called you crazy.

But I didn't say yes right away. Maybe I would've if he'd let me go, but straightaway after he asked me he told me to take my time and think about it. I said I would, but I smiled so, and kissed him

on the cheek, that he knew fairly well what my answer would be. Once we got to my house we didn't go straight in but sat on the porch swing in that autumn chill and talked real low so's my mother and daddy wouldn't hear.

He told me a lot about himself I'd never heard before, how he'd become an undertaker because his daddy had been one and it was the only thing he'd been taught, how his daddy had died when he was nineteen and he'd taken over the undertaking parlor but folks were hesitant to trust their dead to someone that young so he had a hard few years. He never made many friends because he was too busy working at odd jobs he had to do to be able to live. When the Spanish-American War came along, he enlisted, and when he came back to town, folks were more likely to use his services because, he said, then folks thought he was a man since he'd been to war. And he shook his head, his eyes real sad.

He didn't say anything for a while. Then he said he liked what he did, and made no apology to any man for it. It was something that had to be done, just like doctoring or governing, or being a fireman or policeman, something that helped folks. It was then he told me what I said before, about kindness and gentleness being the last things done to them, and I got a little bit weepy when he said that, thinking what a scary old monster we girls had made him out to be. Last, he told me how old he was. Forty. I was nineteen. But it didn't matter any. I told him I'd marry him, and then I kissed him on the lips for the first time. They were warm and dry and soft, just the way I'd always thought a husband's lips should be.

The next day he asked Daddy for my hand, and Daddy said yes. By that time Mother knew Grandpa well enough to know what a good man I was getting. But even I didn't know how good he really was. I found out that winter.

It was a monstrous cold winter. We had our first big snow in mid-November, and it must have been two feet deep at least. It never got cold enough to melt it until early March, so snow piled on top of snow, and it just got deeper and deeper. The roads stayed open, though. Seemed every time you looked, the Hastings boys were out plowing them. Don't know how much the town paid them that winter, but the next spring both Dick and Bob started new houses. Grandpa had a hard time, too. The ground was frozen solid, and the Hastings boys, who also dug the graves at the Upper and Lower Dellfield cemeteries, nearly doubled their price because of it. Grandpa once told me he'd probably paid for their chimneys that



winter. He wouldn't pass on the extra price to his customers, though. Claimed that a loved one's death was bad luck enough, so the freeze was *his* bad luck.

But it wasn't because of the snows alone that folks remembered that winter. Twenty years later you'd mention that winter and folks'd say wasn't that the year Roy Stoller got killed trying to rob the feed store? It wasn't often that things like that would happen, even in *Lower Dellfield*. First shooting death, my daddy said, since Amos Martin accidentally killed his cousin Wilbur when they were hunting back in '03. I don't think it surprised anyone, though, leastways not anyone who knew about Roy Stoller. Roy was a bad'un, no two ways about it. He just seemed doomed for something like that to happen. His daddy was mostly no-account, and his mother died when he was born. Roy quit his schooling when he was only ten to help his daddy try to pull some harvest out of that scrubby ten acres they called a farm. Now, I expect, that ten acres would fetch a fair price, but back then it was worthless. After old Mr. Stoller died, Roy gave up farming and just lived there in the farmhouse, tending a little vegetable patch and keeping mostly to himself, except when he'd come into town for supplies, or to drink at Rohrer's Tavern. Nobody knew for sure where he got the money he needed, but there'd been some talk of insurance money on his daddy, and some folks said he stole. They were proved right, of course. He spent a few days in jail, on and off, especially after drinking nights, mostly from picking fights in the tavern. Had no friends, none at all. People didn't like him much and seemed to stay away.

A couple of weeks after Christmas he broke into the feed store through a back window. He didn't know Mr. Wenger was working late in his office, and Mr. Wenger surprised him with a pistol. Roy Stoller had a gun, too, and shot first but missed. Then Mr. Wenger shot Roy right in the head. The doc said he was dead before he hit the floor.

There were no relatives and no estate to speak of, so the county was supposed to pay a local undertaker fifty dollars to bury him. The sheriff took him to Frank Weyden first, but Weyden wouldn't do it—said it'd be bad for his business, handling criminals. But Grandpa said he'd take Roy, and next day when he told me he'd done it I didn't like it, but I didn't say anything except something about the fifty dollars being a small price to get for tarnishing his business.

He got real serious then, as near to mad as I'd ever seen him.

before or since, and told me that no matter what folks'd done, it wasn't ours to judge them once they were dead, but rather to give them as much dignity and kindness as we could, for they'd be judged quick enough by someone far higher. Then he said Roy Stoller'd never had a chance for anything in his life, and how he was more to be pitied than anything else. His words made me feel pretty small, though I was still concerned with what other folks might think. But that didn't bother Grandpa in the least, and he even gave back to the county what was left of the fifty dollars after he'd paid his costs on the coffin and the gravedigging. I won't profit off an unfortunate, he said, and nobody was more unfortunate than Roy Stoller. Grandpa put him next to his daddy, in the Lower Dellfield Cemetery. At the funeral, there was just him and me and the Negro pastor from the Baptist church over in West Davis. The Dellfield ministers were all busy that day, so they said.

We got married in early February, a week after my twentieth birthday. We hadn't had snow for almost two weeks, and the sun was shining bright as anything. The temperature was just below freezing, and after the winter we'd been through, it felt like the South Seas. It was just a small wedding. I only invited my closest friends and their families. Since Grandpa had no real friends to speak of, I made sure Mother had the two ushers seat some of the guests on the groom's side. Grandpa looked handsome, and the mirror told me I was as pretty as I was ever going to be, and it was a nice wedding. Although at the end of the vows, when we said till death us do part, I got that funny feeling again—it just came over me—and I wondered if I died first, if he'd take care of me, make me ready for the grave.

It was a dark thought, and it had no place at a happy thing like a wedding, so right then I drove it out of my head. But I thought about it for a long time afterwards.

We had the reception in the church basement, and my daddy and mother were both happy but teary-eyed. Grandpa was chattering away with the guests and members of the wedding, just like he'd never been shy in his life, and I remember thinking, well Jiminy Christmas, this man should've got married a long time ago. Some of the people there that day became his friends for life.

I'd asked him and asked him where we were to go on our honeymoon, but he wouldn't tell me. A surprise, was all he'd say. But no Niagara Falls, or anything like that. Somewhere that we can keep, he whispered, and I just couldn't work out what he meant.

After the reception we went back to my daddy's house to pick up.

my suitcase, and then we climbed into Grandpa's Model T, and off we went, out of Upper Dellfield, and through Lower Dellfield, then up into the hills north of here, which surprised me. All the cities and towns of any size are all east and south, but we headed north instead. I said as how I hoped we'd get to where we were going before too long, as night was coming on and the sky had turned dark like there was snow coming. Don't worry, he told me, we're almost there now. And sure enough in another mile he turned the car up this dirt road smack dab through the woods. It looked like it had just been plowed that day, for you could see the brown earth in patches through the snow. Looks like the Hastings boys made it, he said, and I asked him just what was going on here, and he said you'll see.

Finally we came to a spot where the lane ended and the trees got too thick for an automobile to pass. We walk from here, he said, and lifted me out of the car. Then he takes two pairs of snowshoes from the back of the Model T, and I just looked at him. He asked me if I'd ever walked on them before, and of course I hadn't, so he showed me how. I was still asking him what it was all about but he wouldn't tell me, just picked up my suitcase and his and asked me to follow him. Whither thou goest, he said, and laughed.

By that time it was nearly dark, and it had started to snow as well, big wet flakes that looked like white leaves falling in the dusk. We followed a little trail through the trees, and I could see other snowshoe tracks, so I asked whose they were. Grandpa said they were his.

It was just light enough so we didn't need a lantern when we got to the cabin. It was in a little open space in the woods, and a small stream solid with ice was next to it. It was the prettiest little building I'd ever seen, made of light brown logs. There was a black shingle roof and a green door and shutters, and mostly covered with snow as it was, it looked like something from a fairy tale. I felt Grandpa's arm around my shoulders, and he asked me if I liked it. There was no doubt of that. I thought there couldn't have been a better place in the world for two people who loved each other to be alone. He told me his father had built it years before, but after he died Grandpa rented it to an old trapper who finally had to give up his line that past year because of his legs and move in with relatives. Grandpa'd been coming up here for months fixing it up as a surprise for me.

I hugged him hard and told him I couldn't wait to see inside, so

we tramped the rest of the way through the snow, which was falling thicker now, and went inside and lit a lantern. It was beautiful. He'd put curtains at all the windows and hung some pictures on the walls. At one end was a little table with two chairs, a dry sink, and a woodstove, with cupboards full of dishes and food. There were three chairs and a fireplace in the middle of the room, and at the other end was a chest of drawers and a bed behind a big red curtain he'd rigged up so as to give me my privacy. But right then I didn't want any privacy, not from him anyway. I hugged him and kissed him and said as how it would be a wonderful honeymoon, and he laughed that gentle low laugh and said it would be if we didn't freeze first.

He took the lantern over to the big open fireplace and touched a match to the kindling he'd got ready before. It caught fast and started crackling and popping for fair. It must have been a pine knot or something like it that cracked so loud and threw a hot spark into the lantern, but at the time I could've sworn it was a bomb. The lantern just exploded—I didn't see it, just heard it—and when I turned around and looked, Grandpa was falling over like a big tree, and fire was jumping all over the wooden floor. I didn't bother to scream, but yanked down the curtain and started beating out the fire with it. It didn't take long, and then I looked at Grandpa. He'd been scarcely singed, but a piece of that thick, heavy glass from the lantern's base had hit him right on the temple, cutting him open and making him bleed something fierce. He wasn't conscious, either.

I ripped a hunk out of my slip and tried to stop the blood, but it kept coming, slow and steady, and I knew that I had to get him to a doctor fast. I thought of dragging him out to the car on a blanket, but even if I could do it, the jolting might do him worse than leaving him be.

We had only the one lantern, so by the light of the fire I lit some candles, then pressed down on Grandpa's cut and tried to think. It was dark as pitch now, and the snow was falling so thick and the wind blowing so hard it seemed the cabin's roof might blow clean off. There was no way I could get him out, and I wondered if I could find the way out myself, and bring back help. I thought as how that was the only way I could save him, so I put some logs on the fire to keep him warm, tied a bandage tight around his head, bundled myself up as much as I could, and went outside on the snowshoes.

I hadn't gone twenty yards before I knew it was impossible. Even if the trail had been plain in front of me, I couldn't have seen it. So I turned around and made my way back to the cabin, following the little glow of the fire through the windows. Grandpa was no better, still unconscious, though the bleeding had slowed a little. But his breathing was real funny, and I don't mind telling you children I was scared more than I'd ever been, being purely certain he'd die before I could ever get out and maybe bring back somebody the next day.

All I could do was sit there on the floor, holding his poor bleeding head in my lap, and pray. I prayed that night like Jesus must have prayed in the garden. And I'm not sure if God heard me or not, but I know something did. For sometime in that long night, I heard through the wind a knocking on the cabin door. No footsteps on the boards of the porch, but just a knocking. Three times, real slow-like.

I didn't even think. I just ran to the door and flung it open, and I saw Roy Stoller standing there on the porch.

I knew it was him. I'd seen his face before, and it looked fairly as it must have when he was alive. You'll remember the winter had been cold and the ground was frozen. So what was under the ground stayed frozen, too. I could still see the little mark in his forehead where Grandpa had closed up the bullet hole. And the firelight was bright enough that I recognized the old suit of Grandpa's that he'd dressed him in.

I didn't scream. I think I was too scared to. I just stepped back, and Roy Stoller walked into the cabin, went over to Grandpa, and picked him up as lightly as if he were a child. Then he walked to the cabin door with him, and turned and looked at me, like he was waiting. And something in his dead face told me that it was *good* he wanted to do, not bad. So I bundled up again and put on the snowshoes, and though it took all my courage to do it, I wrapped a blanket around Grandpa as he lay in Roy Stoller's arms. Then Roy Stoller walked out the door into the storm, and I followed him.

He didn't glow or nothing, and he didn't talk at all, but I had no trouble following him, even though I couldn't see him. It was like there was some kind of warmth coming from him, and I just followed it. Before too long we were at the car, and Roy Stoller put Grandpa in the back. I just stood there, not knowing what to do next. I'd never driven a car, only ridden in one since I'd been going with Grandpa. So Roy Stoller got it started right up and got in the



driver's side, while I climbed into the back with Grandpa. I wondered how we'd get through the snow—about a foot had fallen, and you couldn't even see the lane we'd come in on—but that didn't worry Roy Stoller none. The automobile just seemed to drift over the snow, and when I looked behind, I couldn't see any tracks we'd made.

We drove for what seemed like ages, passing nary another automobile, though that snow was so thick we wouldn't have seen another car's lights even if anyone had been foolish enough to be out that night. Finally the Model T slowed down and just *floated* to a stop, and I swear I could feel it and us sink slowly and softly into the deep snow on the ground. Roy Stoller didn't do anything, just sat there looking out into the night like he'd done all he could. I looked out to the right and saw a dim light glowing, so I climbed out of the car and walked through the snow toward it. I was just amazed when I saw where I was—right in the middle of town, and that glowing light was a lamp in Doc Farnsworth's window.

I pounded on the door till Doc's wife opened it and called her husband down from upstairs. I took him by the hand and led him out to the automobile, not even wondering what Doc would do when he saw dead Roy Stoller sitting behind the wheel, only worrying about Grandpa and wanting to get him into the warm as quick as could be. But Roy Stoller wasn't in the car anyway, and when Doc was hauling Grandpa up onto his shoulders, I looked out into the dark but couldn't see him anywhere. There was no tracks of his walking away, either, though, even if there had been the wind might've blown them away just that quick. But I don't think there were.

You children all know that Grandpa *didn't* die. He came to the next day, and Doc said it'd been a good thing I got Grandpa to him when I did, that he just might have bled to death. It was peculiar. From the second Roy Stoller picked Grandpa up in his arms, the bleeding stopped. But soon as Doc took him from the car, I could see it had started again. Of course Doc got it stopped fast once we were inside. He knew how.

When Grandpa woke up and realized where he was, he asked me how I did it, how I got him back to town, and so I told him about Roy Stoller. I wasn't sure, and I'm still not sure to this day, whether he believed me or not because he smiled a smile that could've meant he thought I was seeing things, or likewise it might've been a smile he smiled because he knew he'd been right about the way he

thought about and treated the dead folks.

A few days later, when he was up and around and the snow had long since stopped, we went down to the Lower Dellfield Cemetery and looked at Roy Stoller's grave. It was under the snow same as the rest, and when Grandpa brushed the snow away to see the earth beneath, it looked like any fresh grave, with no sign that anything'd come out of it. But still, that wasn't proof that something hadn't. There was nothing else at the grave—no piece of the blanket I'd wrapped around Grandpa or any of the clues you'd expect to find in a real old fashioned ghost story. Just the snow and the hard earth. I left some flowers I'd brought along. Roses. They looked real pretty on the white snow. And I hoped as we walked away that maybe what Roy Stoller'd done that night would help to make up for the bad he'd done when he was alive. The more I thought about it, the more I was sure that it should just plumb *erase* that badness, wipe it away. For all he'd done, Roy Stoller'd never *killed* anybody, but he did save a life, and I was mighty thankful to him for it.

I was thankful, too, that Grandpa was the man he was, that he'd done good for Roy Stoller from his heart. At first I'd thought that what he'd said about kindness to the dead was nice but foolish. But now I know better. It wasn't ever too late to be kind. And you can be kind even to people's memories, and it might be known to them, and appreciated. Grandpa taught me that lesson. He taught me other things, too, and he taught me good. Why, you children can just look at yourselves if you don't believe me.

Oh, I hope you don't mind me calling you children, but that's how I think of you, especially since Grandpa and I never had any of our own. It just seemed natural for us to call *you* our children. After all, we care for you, comfort you, lay you down in your last sleep.

There now. All finished, and all ready. That wasn't bad, was it? I just wish Grandpa was still alive to see how peaceful you look. Yes, peaceful. I may not be the best or the fanciest undertaker in these parts, but I dare hope to say I'm the most gentle.

FICTION

# The Oldest Established, Permanent Floating

by Mary Monica Pulver



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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**I**t was a glorious late fall day. Most of the leaves had fallen and lay in drifts on the ground. Those few left danced in the bright sunlight, stirred by a breeze.

Copper Wind snorted impatiently and looked around his rider's leg at the horse and rider coming up behind. Kori knew just how the stallion felt. She twisted in her saddle to look back.

Susan was riding up the trail at a sedate walk. She was eating an apple that was the same shade of red as her sweater. Storm Wind—who was named for her color, not her temperament—had an especially placid air about her. Maybe on some equine level she was aware that she was being ridden by someone who, like herself, would give birth in the spring.

Copper Wind snorted again and champed at his bit. "Come on," coaxed Kori; "it's not much farther."

"Oh, I hope it's miles and miles yet," said Susan. "This ride is so beautiful, and the air out here is like a good dry wine. I'm in no hurry at all." She came up beside Kori and reined in. "It's funny how you can live all your life in one section of the country and think you know it so well you're actually bored to drive around in it, and all the

while there is magnificence you never knew existed just beyond your line of sight. Thank you for showing all this to me."

Kori smiled. "You're welcome. I've been fortunate in my neighbors' giving me permission to ride cross country. Even Ralph Evans gave permission to cross his land, once I told him the others had."

"Well, good for him, that old grouch! Is this his land we're on now?"

"No, this is Max and Dru Hunzeker's farm. You know, the people who plant my eastern meadow in oats and give me a share of the harvest for the rent of it. But we're almost across their section now; right up ahead is a little finger of Ralph Evans's farm, and beyond it begins the mighty Olen Unger ranch, which we won't cross because I don't think Storm Wind or you should push yourselves too hard." Kori nudged Copper Wind into a walk and they moved down the trail.

"What's this historical artifact you said you'd show me?" asked Susan. "Is it a building?"

"No," said Kori, smiling at some secret thought suggested by the question.

"What is it, then?"

"What I'm going to show you is the diamond on the Evans finger."

"Diamond?"

"You'll see."

It wasn't exactly a diamond, though it did sparkle. It was an old abandoned water-filled quarry, with steep, greenish-grey stone walls, surrounded by a thin tangle of brush and young trees.

"This is the historical artifact?" asked Susan.

"Look at the color of that stone," said Kori. "Recognize it? Our venerable county courthouse is made of that stone, and so is the oldest granary in Charter, both built way, way back, before the railroad came through, bringing fancy stone from the east. That quarry was abandoned before Lincoln was shot."

"Really?" Susan got awkwardly off Storm Wind—they were Kori's horses, she was a novice rider and starting to feel gravid—and went for a closer look. "Oh, I know where we are," she said with great amusement. "This is Lover's Leap. Before we were married, Geof and I—" The words broke off, whether from embarrassment or some other reason Kori couldn't tell.

"Susan?"

"Kori, come here! There's the damndest thing down on the water!"

Kori dismounted and draped the horses' reins over a branch.

"What is it?" she called, beginning to push her way through the underbrush. There were a lot of big, broken stones on the ground, patchy with lichen.

"Look, down there! A car, floating on the water!"

Kori stopped to untangle a long tendril of black hair from the branch of a young tree. "Don't be silly," she said; "cars can't float. Ouch! Except the Volkswagen beetle can, I think. Is it a Volkswagen?"

It wasn't; it was a light blue Chrysler LeBaron of recent vintage, its roof crunched in and its front end smashed. There were a lot of rumples and creases along the side, too, vivid souvenirs of what had apparently been a spectacular accident.

And it was floating high on the water.

"How's it doing that?" asked Kori.

"I don't know," replied Susan. The car was about ten yards away from the edge of the quarry, a little way clockwise from them. The fenders and molding under the doors were little more than touching the surface of the water.

"Maybe the water is shallow," suggested Kori.

Susan stooped, picked up a fist-sized rock, and dropped it into the water. It struck with a ker-floop and vanished from sight. "Silly," said Kori; "all



that tells you is that the water is probably more than a foot deep."

"Yes, but that car is sitting less than a foot into the water. And I've always heard that the water is really, really deep in there."

"Mr. Evans warned me to keep well away from it when he gave me permission to cross his land. I don't think he knows horses can swim. Did you ever go swimming in here, you and Geof?"

Susan chuckled. "At night? No, all we ever did was sit and look at it, between kisses. This used to be a very popular courting place when I was in college. Then old Mr. Evans died and his son put a gate up across the road and padlocked it, so couples couldn't drive back in here any more. But no one ever swims in the quarry; it's too cold—and I can remember a rumor circulating in our grade school that it's poisonous, that two people had fallen in and died because they swallowed some of it. Not that the place isn't dangerous anyway; I mean, look, the water level is twelve feet below the rim; if you did fall in, it would be a case of how long can you tread water."

"What do you suppose happened to the people who were in the car when it fell in?" asked Kori.

"How do you suppose they drove back in here without any tires on their wheels?" asked Susan.

"What?"

"No tires, see? And that car never got that battered falling in here; it hit something more solid than water, or had something substantial fall on it. This was just somebody's way of getting rid of it afterwards."

"Is that what you do with a wrecked car?" asked Kori. She was not only wealthy, her upbringing had been a sheltered one.

"Well, it costs money to have them hauled off to a junkyard. So somebody just towed it back here and shoved it over the edge."

"I thought you said the new Mr. Evans put a locked gate across the road."

"That was seven or eight years ago. Geof and I haven't found it necessary to go courting in a car for a long time; maybe he's taken it down since then."

"Or maybe it's Mr. Evans's car," said Kori. She frowned at the water. "Of course, that doesn't explain why it's floating."

"We had about decided it wasn't a real car but a model made of wood or papier mâché," said

Kori over dinner that evening. "And some demented artist anchored it in the quarry because he couldn't get permission to put it in some more public spot. But then we noticed that it didn't bob in the waves we made by throwing rocks into the water, so we decided that maybe an alien had parked his flying saucer in the quarry and put the car on top so he could find it again. Please don't tell me the water really is shallow because that would spoil the mystery."

Kori's husband was a detective sergeant and preferred his mysteries solved. Nevertheless, he smiled at her. "Okay, I won't tell you the water's shallow."

She smiled back. "Even though it is?"

"I have no idea."

**T**he next day at lunchtime four detectives were sitting around a table at Martino's, eating roast beef sandwiches spiced with mustard and horseradish, and drinking Pepsi. One of them worked in Property Crime and was currently involved in an investigation of a possible "chop shop" selling stolen auto parts, so Brichter repeated the story his wife had told at dinner.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Paper car? Alien mark-

ing his place? Shallow water?"

"It isn't shallow," said Captain Ryder, Brichter's boss in the Organized Crime Unit. He was a silver-haired man with a rumpled face and kind blue eyes. "I can remember back when I was a kid, some of us went swimming in there. It was a hot day in August and there was an outbreak of polio, so all the regular spots were closed. We let down a rope so we could get back out again. None of us could dive to the bottom, even me, and I was a pretty good swimmer. Then old Evans came along—he was the grandfather of the current Evans, a very rough old man, popularly believed to be a gangster—and said he'd teach us to swim in his quarry. We were pretty sure we already knew how to do that, but he threatened to cut the rope and let us drown in there so we came up and let him demonstrate that a switch applied to wet skin really smarts. We smarted from it for about a week, smartened up enough never to go back."

"I heard the water is poison," said Sergeant Graybill. He was a large, chesty man from Property Crime, the one investigating the chop shop. "That some people died from drinking from it."

"That isn't true, obviously;

I'm still alive. But I bet I know where that tale started: a man and woman threw themselves into the quarry and drowned—some kind of lover's pact. It happened when my dad was a young man; I remember him telling me about it. He said the water was so cold that when they floated to the surface a week later they were perfectly preserved. I do remember that the water was like ice when we went swimming; we had to climb out every few minutes and stand in the sun and thaw out. Must be a spring feeding that pool."

"How come the wrecked car appears to be floating on the surface?" asked Captain Colly, a black man with a sad, round face; he was in charge of Narcotics.

"Beats me," said Ryder.

"The floating car is a light blue LeBaron?" asked Sergeant Graybill. "And the quarry is on Ralph Evans's property?"

"Yeah, why?" asked Brichter.

"Because Evans bought a late-model used LeBaron, light blue, early this summer and reported it stolen day before yesterday. Said they came and took it right out of his barnyard."

"You think it was chop shop boys?" asked Brichter.

"I've been working on that assumption. Was it stripped?"

"No tires, Kori said. There

was no way to check if anything else was missing."

"Why the hell would they take it back where they got it?"

"They didn't," said Ryder. "They stole it out of a barnyard, right? And they dumped it in a quarry. Maybe they weren't aware that the quarry is on Evans's property."

Brichter and Graybill scoffed at this, but Colly said, "I remember being surprised when I found out all land out in the country belongs to someone who keeps pretty good track of it." He looked at the surprised faces looking at him. "I was born and raised in a big city, but I spent the whole year I was sixteen on my new brother-in-law's farm. I got caught trespassing, stealing walnuts. I had no idea anyone else even knew that tree was there, much less that it had an owner who'd consider me a thief. If those chop shop guys are city people, it might never occur to them that the quarry belongs to anyone."

"That's true," said Brichter. He asked Graybill, "How sure are you a chop shop is operating in Charter?"

"Pretty sure. Why?"

"Because something like that is usually run by organized crime people. Why don't you ask my boss here if he'll allow one of his people to assist you

in the investigation? Because if he'll say yes, then I'll get to go with you when you ask Mr. Evans for permission to look at the quarry. And I'd like to find out myself how a car comes to float on the water."

"Captain, may I?" said Graybill.

"Yes, you may."

**T**he Evans farm was a small dairy operation on the downward economic slope. The barn and outbuildings were small. Some of them did not quite stand at ninety degree angles to the ground; others were losing shingles. The house was a shabby green and surrounded by deceased trucks and worn-out farm machinery.

Mrs. Evans and a boy kept home from school with toothache came to the door at Graybill's knock. "Pa's in the milkhouse," said the boy.

Evans was a tall, slat-thin man with an Adam's apple that appeared ready to burst through his skinny neck and a nervous way of wiping his knobby hands on his overalls. Not that they didn't need wiping; he'd been repairing the refrigeration unit on his milk cooler, and greasy parts were all over the broken concrete floor behind him. "Sergeant Graybill," he said with a little nod.

"And this is Sergeant Brichter, from our Organized Crime Unit, assisting me in this investigation."

"Organized Crime?" A deeply puckered frown formed on Evans's forehead; Brichter would not have thought he had skin to spare for such wrinkles.

"I'm working on a theory that there is an organization in Charter that steals cars, cuts them up for their parts, and gets rid of the remainder somewhere."

The frown smoothed away. "Oh, I see."

"And I have reason to believe a car matching the description of your stolen vehicle is in the quarry on your property."

"Huh?"

"I said, I have reason to believe—"

"I heard you. And that's crazy!"

"Two women riding horseback yesterday afternoon reported seeing a blue Chrysler LeBaron in your quarry," said Brichter.

"That quarry's full of water!"

"Yes, sir, we know that," said Graybill.

"So how'd they see a car?"

"Well, with your permission, we'd like to go take a look for ourselves."

Evans looked torn, didn't say anything for a long ten seconds. Then, "No, I don't think so. You

guys'd go back there, one of you'd fall in, prob'bly, and I'd end up with a lawsuit."

"So come with us," invited Graybill.

"No, I got stuff to do. I got to get this damn thing fixed before it's time to milk the cows again."

"But we think—"

"I don't care what you think! Two ladies, a hundred ladies, couldn't see a car that had fell into that quarry because it's forty foot deep! Now get on out of here and leave me alone!" He turned his back on them and returned to his labors, muttering to himself.

"**B**ut we shook him," said Graybill to Brichter in the former's car a few minutes later. They were in one large hurry to get to town. "Did you see that? I wonder why?"

"We'll know soon enough. This is a 'gimme' for a search warrant."

It took only forty-five minutes to draw up the warrant and find a judge to sign it, and by the time Graybill came triumphantly out of the grey-green county courthouse, waving the paper to dry its freshly inked signature, Brichter had rounded up a squad car and a tow truck whose passenger owned a wet suit.

Evans wasn't in his barn,

though the motor parts were still strewn on the floor. Mrs. Evans said she'd heard him leave in the pickup some while ago, and thought maybe he'd gone into town for something. She said that of course they could go back and look at the quarry if they wanted to; no, she didn't care to come along; she was going to stay in the house and tend her sick boy.

The narrow dirt lane degenerated into twin ruts before reaching the quarry, where it made a turn-around circle at the edge. The pickup had turned around and been brought to a halt off the lane this side of the circle. Graybill pulled his car off on the other side so the tow truck could get by and turn around, presenting its hook to the quarry. When the truck's motor died, they could hear faint cries for help.

Evans was in the water, clinging to the wreckage of a blue LeBaron. Even at this distance they could see that his lips matched the car in color. "H-h-h-hurry!" he managed.

"Well, I'll be dipped in horsefeathers," Graybill said. Evans was shoulder deep in water, hanging onto the brake drum at the back of the car—and the car was on top of the water, leaning just a little bit in his direction.

The hook was lowered on its

cable. Evans managed to swim to it and hang on to it while he was dragged up the rough stone wall to safety. "D-d-d-dumb," he managed through chattering teeth as Brichter wrapped him in a blanket from Graybill's trunk. "D-d-d-didn't b'lieve you. Had t-t-to come look. F-f-fell in."

Hank Ross, the plump owner of the tow truck, emerged from the bushes a few minutes later in his black wet suit and flippers. He made a shallow dive into the quarry, and came up open-mouthed. "Jeeeeeee-hose-phat!" he yelled. "I'll say it's cold!" But in another minute the suit had warmed its trapped water, and he struck out for the car. He swam around it, widening his circle at the front, and stood upright in the water to report, "It's on something. Can't see what."

"What do you mean, 'on something'?" called Graybill.

"It's on something. A pile of something. A platform, kind of."

"The flying saucer, do you think?" said Brichter.

"Let's get the car out so we can see," suggested Graybill.

Willie, Ross's assistant, lowered the hook again and, on orders, some lengths of cable with loops on their ends. In about twenty minutes, the blue Le-

Baron was hauled across the water and up the cliff.

"More cars," reported Ross, after swimming back for another look. "There's more cars down here."

"Looks like we'll be here a while," said Brichter.

Graybill checked the serial number of the retrieved LeBaron against the number on the stolen car report; they matched. He and Brichter went to tell Evans that. The man was sitting huddled in the back seat of the squad car. He nodded his head. "Yeah, I thought they might," he said glumly.

"There are more cars down there; we're going to bring them up, too," said Graybill.

"Your search warrant cover that?" asked Evans.

"Yes, sir, it does."

The LeBaron was resting on a three-year-old Toronado, a tomato red model. It was not on the hot car list, but the big computer in the Safety Building had it listed as stolen. Under the Toronado were two cars, a five-year-old Cordoba and a seven-year-old Camaro. All the cars were severely damaged, but no significant parts were missing except the tires and batteries. And over a period of years, all had been reported stolen.

A second tow truck was sent



for, and by the time the ten-year-old Firebird, twelve-year-old Electra, and fifteen-year-old New Yorker were up, the mobile crime lab van had arrived and set up its lights so they could continue—the sun had about gone down.

The press arrived just as the '55 Oldsmobile Ninety-Eight convertible was breaking through the murky water.

When the green Coronet sedan was brought up, Brichter went to talk with Evans.

"Coronet?" Evans said, his eyebrows high on his forehead. "What the hell kind of car is that?"

"A Dodge," said Brichter. "From 1953."

"Christ! How many cars are down there?"

"We're a way from the bottom yet, Mr. Evans. Would you care to make a statement at this time?"

"About what?"

"About how long people have been using your quarry as a dumping place for wrecked cars."

"Don't talk to me, mister! I was only just born in 1953!" Evans leaned forward to look out the window. "How long is this going to take?"

"Dunno. How deep is the quarry?"

"Forty foot, I guess. Maybe

deeper. My granddad told me it was sixty foot deep, but I remember my dad laughing and saying it was probably closer to forty, but that I should stay away from it because that was still plenty deep enough to drown in. I guess it depends on where you measure it."

Brichter got out again and a reporter came over to ask, "What kind of car are they bringing up now?"

"That's a 1948 DeSoto."

"Who made the DeSoto?" asked the reporter, who was very young. "Chrysler?"

"Yeah, and I think they made the Hudson, too," said Brichter dryly. He went to talk to Willie, operating his hook.

"Too bad these cars are such wrecks," said Willie. "There's some real classics down there. See that '48 DeSoto? Even if it hadn't been underwater for thirty years, about all you could salvage is the door handles."

"You don't think having all those other cars piled on top of it explains the damage?" asked Brichter.

"That car burned," Willie said. "I seen a lot of stuff in my time, but I never seen a car that burns under water." Willie was all of nineteen.

"What about the rest of the cars? Do you think they were all wrecks before they were

dumped in here?"

Willie shrugged. "Looks like it. Cars were really built back then. About the only way you get a '48 DeSoto to look like that is to run over it with a train."

The sun had been up a long time when the twenty-third—and last—car was brought up. It was a touring car of immense size and antiquity, a Packard, barely recognizable as a car at all, being severely squashed and very crumbly with rust. Evans came out of the squad car to stand with his wife and watch it hoisted over the rim. She had come down to be with him, having put the tooth-ached boy and his older sister to bed.

"I remember seeing a picture of a car like that in an old photo album," she said. "Your great-grandmother might have ridden in just such a car."

"Hush, Norma," he said. "Let's go home; show's over." He asked Graybill, "Can we go home?"

"Sure, if you promise not to leave town."

"We promise," said Evans. "Couldn't afford bus tickets to anywhere, anyhow." Brichter heard him ask as they walked to their elderly pickup, "Did the cows get milked yet?"

"Yes, I called over to Hunzeker's, and Dru came over."

"Not that it did any good," he

said; "I never did get that cooler put back together."

**B**y the time Brichter got home it was almost noon. Kori had finished chores and was working out finances on her computer in the den. She knocked off long enough to make him an enormous breakfast, and kindly waited until he had taken the edge off his appetite before asking any questions.

"Well, how did the car manage its trick?" she asked.

"It was resting on top of, a whole stack of cars, all at least as badly wrecked at it was."

"That's interesting. Who put them down there?"

"We don't know. A suggestion has been made that it's several generations of car thieves."

"Is it usual that stolen cars are wrecked by the thieves?"

"It's not universally the case. And what's even more peculiar, that LeBařon was wrecked a long time ago, long before it was stolen, probably even before it was bought by Evans."

"Who'd buy a wrecked car?"

"Someone after parts. Or willing to put in the hours it takes to restore it. Neither of which was done by Evans."

"Did Mr. Evans mention it was a wreck when he reported it stolen?"

"No."

"So what are you going to do now?"

"Go to bed for a couple of hours, then go back to work."

**A**uto titles are traceable. The previous owner of the LeBaron had been Ray's Towing and Parts in a little town just across the state line. And when Graybill dialed the number of the only Jakobowski in Beaver Dam—the name and town listed as the owner before Ray's—he got Jakobowski's widow, who said her husband had been killed in a car accident ten months ago, while driving his new blue LeBaron.

"I don't get it. Why would a guy buy a wrecked car, then license and insure it? And who the hell would steal it?"

"Chop shops steal cars for their parts."

"That LeBaron was so smashed, about all that was left worth having was the trunk. Even the engine block was cracked."

"Let's see if we can trace the next oldest car, the Toronado."

The man who had bought it was one Ralph Evertson. It, too, had been purchased from a junkyard, though the owner before that had survived her accident. "It was totalled," she said on the phone. "The insurance company paid for a new

one; my car was only four months old when that man ran a red light and shoved me into the bus."

The man who had bought the Cordoba—from a junkyard, of course—was Randolph Edwards. His street address in the stolen car report was the same as Evertson's; which turned out to be one of those places that forwards mail for a fee.

"All right, we're talking some kind of fraud here," said Graybill. "But who?"

"I vote for Evans," said Brichter. "It's his LeBaron and his quarry."

"Aw, how can it be Ralph Evans? He only took over his father's farm in 1979. And he wasn't even born when someone started dumping cars into that quarry."

"Yes," said Brichter, "but look. The oldest car in there was built in 1915. Say the man who did it was at least eighteen. If he's still dumping cars in the quarry, he's in his nineties. That's the longest criminal career I've ever heard of."

"I read in the paper there's a region in Tennessee where fathers are teaching their sons the fine art of running a chop shop," said Graybill.

"In this case," said Brichter, "it appears that the grandsons have now entered their apprenticeship. This beats Tennessee

all hollow." He slouched back in his chair and pulled an ear. "I'm convinced the man who put the LeBaron in there was Ralph Evans. And I'm sure he's Evertson and Edwards as well."

"Okay," said Graybill. "But what's he getting out of it? I don't understand what the con is here."

"It's insurance fraud. You go to an out-of-state junkyard and buy a car to get the title. You buy the classiest piece of total wreck you can find. You want a recent wreck, one with all the parts still pretty much there—especially the parts with the car's serial number on them."

"Why go out of state for your wreck?"

"Because in our state, when a car is wrecked, the used parts dealer who gets it writes 'Junked' on the title and sends it to the motor vehicle department. It's the title you're after; you have to go to a state that sells you one with the car. You send in the title to the state motor vehicle department—inflate the price you paid for it so they won't realize the car isn't in good shape. You pay the sales tax, transfer of title, and license plate fees. And you insure it. It's a funny thing, but no one will come around from the state or the insurance com-

pany to look at your alleged car. Then greed has a fight with caution over how long you wait, and when a compromise period has expired, you call the cops and report it stolen. The cops can't find it, of course. Thirty days later, you collect from your insurance company."

Graybill's broad face puckered as he considered all this, then he waxed indignant. "Son of a beehive, that could work!"

Brichter said, "Damn right, if you're careful and don't do it too often. It would never do to have some observant person notice that the same individual is having one hell of a run of bad luck with his cars. And you have to find a good hiding place for the wrecks—because if the wreck is found, the jig is up."

"Okay, but who was pulling this stunt before Evans?"

"The man who owned the quarry before him, I imagine."

"It was my dad told me," admitted Evans the next morning. He had not seemed surprised to find the two on his doorstep, come to arrest him. He nodded thoughtfully when told his rights, then volunteered a full statement. "He had cancer, you know. Ate him up over two, three years, slow but steady. I went to visit him in the hospital

close to the end, and we got to kind of talking about how the farm wasn't doing too well. We never have had much luck. If it isn't coliform enteritis killing the calves, it's forgetting to separate out the milk from a cow on antibiotics, and having to dump a whole's day's worth down the drain. He buys a nice cow from his cattle jockey and turns out she's got the fastest hind hoof in the state; broke his leg and laid him up for eight weeks. The lastest was, Farmer's Bank fails. I got a loan with them; and the FDIC figures mine was one of the bad loans so it don't go over to First Federal which takes up Farmer's as a branch. And it's now due to them. Them boys is worse than the IRS; they don't even leave you grocery money.

"But I told Dad not to worry. I said we'd manage, just like he always had, and he grinned and said he was sure I would. Dad was a friendly sort; when he was up to it, he'd travel the hospital, visiting patients, and he'd save up their jokes and stories to tell me. He said he'd heard this interesting way to raise three or four thousand dollars if you didn't do it too often and was careful. And he told me just what you told me, Sergeant Brichter, about the junkyard and getting the title and all. I

used a fake name the first two times, and a mail drop I found advertised in the paper, but it went down so easy, I figured I should be able to do it one time in my own name and not have the hassle of the mail drop.

"Dad had told me you had to be careful to get rid of the wreck, that you needed a real good hiding place. He didn't mention the quarry, of course, because he was tellin' it like someone else had told him. How was I to know Dad had already about filled up that quarry with cars he'd bought over the years, and that the third car I'd dump in there would break through the top of the water? So after the first, I put the gate up and encouraged stories that had been around since I was a kid, that the water was poison and there was no way out once you fell in. I didn't think it would do any harm to let Mrs. Brichter ride over the land, and it might seem suspicious to tell her no after everyone else said yes—Mrs. Brichter: Is she related to you?"

"Not by blood," said Brichter.

"I did it late at night, y'see, and never thought to go by in the daytime and see if it sank or not. If he'd only of told me, I'd've cut a new road around to the other side. Looking at the list you showed me, it appears

a car got dumped in there every few years straight on back to Gran'dad's time; it's a wonder it wasn't filled up eight or nine cars back. I remember one of Gran'dad's friends telling me when I was a little bit of a boy that Gran'dad was a real stem-winder, whatever that means, that he'd run shine up and down the state during Prohibition. If I was smart, I might've thought that a man who'd run shine might get up to other things. It was my Gran'dad bought this place, you know; his dad was a city boy from Louisville.

"Soon's that Camaro come up, I knew what had happened because I remember it sitting out behind the house for a day

or so. I remember because my boy cut his foot on the torn fender, climbing up on it, and my dad told him to stay the hell away from the junkers around the place. The first one I put down there was the Cordoba; paid eight hundred for it, got six thousand and the FDIC crew off my neck.

"When you got back to that car that looked like Al Capone might've drove it, I didn't know whether to bust out laughing or crying. Here since Dad died, I thought it was because I'm a bad manager that I couldn't make it on just what the farm brought in. And all the while, all the damn while, the place never paid its way; it's been that quarry keeping the farm afloat."

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# Not Just Any Tuesday

## by Chuck Bright



**B**ecause his mother was still very much alive, Willoughby Birnbaum carefully stepped over all the sidewalk cracks as he made his way down the street on his usual Tuesday evening shopping excursion to Mr. Zamarin's bookshop.

Yes, Zamarin would be there. He was always there. Willoughby had reconciled himself to that fact. Zamarin would be behind the heavy dust-covered oak desk by the door, puffing on his cigar as usual. Sitting there like a pasty alabaster Buddha, his immense body compacted tightly between the unyielding arms of his swivel chair and looking for all the world like a bloated corpse freshly pulled from the greenish waters of a stagnant pond.

Willoughby chuckled aloud at the image and reminded himself

to stop being so melodramatic. He stooped to pick up a closed safety pin near the curb, said a good luck incantation, and stuck the pin in his lapel.

No, he didn't like Mr. Zamatin, and it was certainly clear that Mr. Zamatin didn't care for him.

"He's *always* making fun of me," Willoughby muttered, loudly enough for two young girls to stop and snicker at him as he passed the marquee of the old movie house.

But Willoughby couldn't be bothered by them this evening. More important things occupied his mind. For one thing, there was the confrontation to worry about.

Confrontation. The morning tea leaves decreed it. Willoughby would be exposed to a potentially dangerous confrontation within twenty-four hours. His tea leaves never lied.

And hadn't that very same tea been served to him in a delicate Wedgewood cup? A cup with a barely discernible House of Usher-like fissure running down its side, which allowed the dark tea to seep out drop by drop and form a wet circle on the white linen tablecloth? Was that only a coincidence?

"Coincidence." Willoughby snorted as he stopped at the intersection less than a block away from Zamatin's shop. "Coincidence!" he repeated. "That'll be the day."

"I beg your pardon?" asked an older man who also waited at the crosswalk for the light to change.

"I said 'that'll be the day,' if it's any of your business!" Willoughby's voice cracked with emotion. Startled, the older man drew back, shook his head, and crossed the street without waiting for the light to change. "And that's against the law!" Willoughby shouted at the retreating figure, pointing an accusing finger at him. The old man shot a glance back at him and mumbled something Willoughby couldn't hear. Incensed, Willoughby called after him. "I suppose those crossed knives on the table next to me just happened to be another one of your coincidences?" He viciously poked his glasses back up on the bridge of his nose, straightened his bow tie defiantly, and crossed the street when the light changed to green.

Within moments he found himself in front of the dark, streaked front glass of Zamatin's shop. Willoughby hesitated.

The confrontation. It had to be a confrontation with Zamatin. It couldn't be anyone else. Willoughby thought about turning around, heading straight back to his two room efficiency apartment on the

thirteenth floor of the old Bederman Building, and avoiding the inevitable confrontation. Nobody would be any the wiser. . . .

But if he didn't go into the shop, Zamatin would know why, and soon everyone would know about it. Willoughby could see it all now. "Willoughby had another one of those stupid feelings of his," Zamatin would announce. "He decided against paying us his usual visit this evening."

Everyone would have a good laugh about it at Willoughby's expense. He couldn't let that happen, could he?

He put his hand against the dirty glass, blocking out the ghost-like dancing reflections of the flashing night lights of the city, and peered, owl-like, into the darkened interior of the shop.

Nearly closing time. As Willoughby had foretold, Zamatin sat behind the desk by the door, puffing on a dark cigar and speaking in an uninterested manner to one of his other Tuesday evening regulars, old Mrs. Flaherty. From time to time, Zamatin blew thick clouds of dark grey smoke into the sneezing face of the apricot-colored poodle that Mrs. Flaherty always cradled in her arms. The dog's little red tam o'shanter wiggled convulsively every time he sneezed, which brought an appreciative sneer to Zamatin's thick lips. Zamatin turned towards the shop window and saw Willoughby peering inside, and his sneer seemed to enlarge grotesquely to show yellow teeth.

It was too late for Willoughby to turn back now. He had been seen. After the obligatory fingertip touch on the unpainted door jamb and a deep breath, Willoughby entered the shop, accompanied by the delicate tintinnabulation of the little brass bell over the door.

"Evenin', Willoughby." Zamatin seemed to leer as Willoughby scurried towards the back of the shop where his favorite books were kept. "Runnin' a little late, aren't you, Willoughby? I thought maybe you might decide not to pay us a little visit tonight."

"I'm here now, aren't I?" Willoughby retorted, without breaking stride.

That's telling him.

But how had Zamatin known that he had considered not coming in that evening? There was something very sinister about that man, something very evil.

Willoughby pitterpatted back to the oblong bin that contained his "old friends," the used books Zamatin had contemptuously labeled WORKS CONCERNING THE SPIRIT WORLD AND OTHER FICTION.

Other FICTION, indeed. Well, if that had been the confrontation, it hadn't been so bad. In fact, Willoughby had come out on top, it seemed.

Willoughby always felt better when he was standing by the bin of books that contained all his favorite works dealing with paranormal events and spiritualism, all the old previously-owned volumes with their soft leather covers and musty smells.

They were all there, all of Willoughby's friends, and each occupied its usual rightful place in the bin. Andrew Davies' *Divine Revelations* nestled next to Dr. Kane's tome on spiritual rapping. Next to it sat F.W. Myers' classic, *Phantasms Living*. But next to that was a new book, a different book, a book he had never seen before on any previous Tuesday night visit to the shop. Willoughby read the title of the oversized folio:

*Certain Rules and Directives for the Time of the Pestilential Contagion*, by Dr. Francis Hering.

What a coincidence! Dr. Hering's book had been the topic of heated debate at last evening's regularly scheduled meeting of the Psi-Eye Society. Those who had read it described it as a truly fascinating book that discussed the use of church bells of certain timbre to summon the faithful to worship service, while at the same time driving away witches and dispelling the black death that was laying waste to the English countryside.

Willoughby gingerly opened the cover of the old book to the title page. *Ex Libris* the Salem Public Library. Salem, Massachusetts.

Wide-eyed, Willoughby tenderly turned a few of the thick, yellowed pages and gazed in rapture at the archaic script of the old book from Salem.

Without warning, a discolored envelope fell from the book and dropped into Willoughby's hands. It was a thin envelope with a faint pattern of delicate veins running at random across its face. Intrigued, Willoughby turned it over and stared at the seal . . . a thin red waxen seal imprinted with a pentagram.

Like a boy caught with his hands in the cookie jar, Willoughby quickly put the envelope back into the book and glanced towards the front of the shop. Zamatin and Mrs. Flaherty had resumed their discussion and evidently hadn't seen a thing.

"I need this book," Willoughby whispered. "I want this book."

"Well, bring it up here, Willoughby," Zamatin's voice boomed. "I ain't comin' to you, you know. I ain't no waitress!" Zamatin and

Mrs. Flaherty shared another laugh while Willoughby quietly paid for the book from Salem and its mysterious contents. The little bell tinkled happily behind him as he closed the door and scurried back to his apartment.

Secured within the confines of his own apartment, Willoughby doublechecked the deadbolts, closed his windows, and drew the heavy shades. As if performing a ritual, he then crossed to his desk and placed the book next to his gooseneck study lamp. He turned on the forty-watt bulb in his lamp and stared at the book for a moment or two in silent meditation. He liked his apartment dark and felt safe there. Unconsciously, he reached for the black candle on the desk, lit it, and reverently placed it next to the book, watching the flame's shadows dance on its cover.

A voice seemed to whisper in his ear. "The book," it hissed. "Retrieve the envelope. . . ."

Willoughby turned around quickly, expecting to find someone (or *something*) standing next to him. Willoughby smiled.

"All right," he said. "I will."

He opened the book's cover, removed the envelope, and turned it over to inspect the seal more carefully. Definitely a pentagram, and definitely very old. He stuck his thumbnail under the hard wax and gently pried it up. The wax cracked and then split. The seal was broken. An anticipatory gasp escaped Willoughby's lips as he visualized what might happen when he actually opened the flap.

Who knew what might happen? After all, one doesn't have a book from Salem and a mysterious, pentagram-sealed envelope literally fall into one's hands every day of the week.

Anything might happen. He slipped his finger under the flap and slid it carefully, half expecting shrunken spirits to escape and whirl about his head in a cacophonous Mephistophelian-mad chorus. Or maybe cloven-hooved messengers would appear amid billows of sulphuric smoke.

He giggled with barely suppressible glee as he triumphantly opened the flap.

Nothing happened. Nothing at all.

With grave disappointment, he poked a finger inside the envelope to discover its contents.

Willoughby leaped from his chair like a singed cat, yelping with



pain. He stared down at his finger. Blood dribbled out of it and dropped onto the desk top. He stuck the cut finger in his mouth and sucked the blood.

Boobytrapped! The envelope was boobytrapped! Perfect! Now that's more like it, he thought to himself as he carefully lifted the flap with his good hand to discover the source of his pain. Under it, someone had hidden a thin, razor-sharp strip. How long had it lurked there, waiting to protect the envelope's secrets from prying fingers?

Inside the envelope, Willoughby found three sheets of very thin paper that had been folded in half. They were apparently blank. Willoughby looked at the papers again and again but couldn't find writing on any of them. Blank pieces of paper?

Why would anybody go to all the bother of boobytrapping an envelope, sealing it with wax, and imprinting a pentagram on it, just to protect three blank sheets of paper?

"That's the answer! Nobody would!" he shouted.

That was the only answer. The sheets couldn't be blank. Willoughby poked his glasses back up on the bridge of his nose and grabbed a magnifying glass from his desk drawer. He adjusted the light from the gooseneck lamp and hunched over the desk, scanning the paper with the lens.

In the dim pool of light he squinted at the paper and, after two unsuccessful attempts, finally managed to discern some words on the front of the first page. They were faded, almost a pastel blue in a delicate watercolor wash, but there were words . . . three words.

*Taper to paper.* Willoughby blinked in confusion. Hoping for divine inspiration, or any kind of inspiration, he read the words aloud.

"Taper to paper."

He raised his eyes from the parchment to the flickering candle's flame. Taper to paper!

Triumphantly, Willoughby picked up the first sheet and held it close to the candle's flame. Taper to paper. Secret writing, like that old children's magic trick. You write a message on paper in lemon juice and it's invisible. But you hold that same paper to the heat of an open flame and the message magically appears.

Willoughby's nostrils quivered as he lightly scorched the page amid growing black smudges and light wisps of acrid smoke.

Nothing there. He moved the sheet a fraction of an inch to the

right. Something started to appear. Could it be a name? Yes, a name. And a date.

*Matthew Maulle. 1689.*

Willoughby gasped in amazement and nearly held the paper next to the open flame for too long before he realized what he was doing.

He licked his lips and tried to fit the pieces of this paranormal puzzle together. Salem, Massachusetts. Three years before the infamous witch trials that claimed the lives of nineteen citizens who were convicted of sorcery and dealings with the devil.

But Matthew Maulle? Why did that name seem so strangely familiar to him? Willoughby picked up the silver candleholder and walked to the window, engrossed in thought. He put his hand through the crack in the drapes and stared at the nearly deserted city street far below his window.

Matthew Maulle? A member of the society? No, the name appeared in something he had recently read.

Willoughby snapped his fingers and scurried to the special dictionary stand in the corner of his apartment. Switching on the little light on the stand, he consulted the opened pages of his *Concordium Diablium*.

Almost as if by magic, he found the name for which he searched.

*Matthew Maulle (?-1692)*

"He shall have blood to drink!" With this curse on the man who secured his conviction for witchcraft, Matthew Maulle went to the gallows in the Massachusetts village of Salem in 1692.

Maulle, a poor Puritan, owned a fine freshwater spring. Gilbert Pyncheon, a rich village merchant, coveted the site and engineered Maulle's conviction on false charges of sorcery, sacrilege, and the ritual murder of innocent young children.

Pyncheon acquired Maulle's land and built a grand house on the site. But on the very night of the housewarming festivities, Gilbert Pyncheon was discovered by friends in an upstairs room . . . dead of a brain hemorrhage.

The people of Salem remembered Maulle's curse and shivered.

Willoughby shivered, too, and continued reading.

New England legend maintains that Matthew Maulle might actually have practiced black magic in the village, and may have lived the life of a warlock. According to popular folklore, he recorded the darkest secrets of his profession years before his execution. These secrets, in the form of cryptograms and mystic formulae, included incantations for the acquisition of great wealth, a curse with which to do injury to one's avowed enemies, and a formula for a mystical powder which granted one the power of levitation and flight.

These secrets are traditionally believed to have been preserved in an envelope made from the skin of one of the victims of his satanic rituals.

No historical evidence or documents exist to prove or disprove the stories concerning Matthew Maulle, but the legends persist to this day.

No historical evidence or documentation, indeed! Willoughby turned and stared at the papers on his desk.

"I have work to do," he sighed. "Serious work to do." He returned to his desk, lit another candle, and began the tedious task of slowly holding *taper to paper* to discover the secrets of Matthew Maulle. As he worked, he imagined that he heard the spirit of Matthew Maulle chanting "brother, brother" from across the years.

When the clock on the wall struck three A.M., Willoughby barely noticed. But minutes later, he stopped his work. He had finished deciphering all the script on the first piece of paper. He studied it for a moment, and weighed the possibilities of the first formula.

Three very intricate mystic cryptograms and a short inscription had appeared. *These mystic symbols on portal found . . . wealth and riches soon abound.*

Willoughby knew what he had to do. He removed the Tanguisic ceremonial dagger from its place on his wall and shoved a chair near his front door. Parchment in hand, he meticulously etched the intricate symbols into the hard wood over his doorway. It was four o'clock by the time he finished.

He replaced the dagger on the wall, put the chair back in its place, and waited. Nothing happened for several minutes. No blocks of solid gold bullion materialized before his very eyes, no stock certificates flitted down from the ceiling, no King Solomon riches flew around the room like confetti. No *nothing*.

Briefly disappointed, Willoughby grunted and began work on the second page of the manuscript. "I guess these things take time," he said, sticking the second page close to the fourth candle he had lit and placed on the desk.

One candle later, Willoughby finished the second page. A crude depiction of the traditional "evil eyes" stared at him from the parchment. Below it appeared a curse for causing harm to one's enemies. Willoughby had encountered the evil eyes in his studies. Evil eyes that, with black unblinking pupils, graced the tombs of the pharaohs and still kept watch for hidden boat-killing shoals from the bows of most Mediterranean fishing vessels. Evil eyes that caused judges at Salem to lead suspected witches into the courtroom backwards and blindfolded to ward off ill effects.

Here it was. A curse for one's enemies. According to the formula, Willoughby had to write the name of his enemy in blood next to the evil eyes on the page and murmur the curse. Then the power would be his. Willoughby felt that he had many enemies and smiled when he saw that there was room for many names.

But who would it be? Who would be the first to feel the curse? Who had hurt him the most?

Of course. Willoughby scraped the fresh scab off his finger and squeezed out drops of blood so that they fell on the page. He wrote the name "Zamatin" next to the evil eyes, murmured the incantation, and began work on the third and final page of the manuscript.

An ambulance screamed outside his window in the early morning traffic of the city, but Willoughby fought off fatigue and barely noticed it as he continued his work.

After two more hours of labor, Willoughby finished deciphering the message on the last page of parchment. Only six words appeared on the entire page.

*From POWDER comes POWER OF FLIGHT.* Willoughby shook his head.

Powder? What powder?

He clenched his fists. *What powder?* How could he be so close to the power of flight and now run into this dead end? That is, assuming the first two spells were real, and that . . .

It was then that Willoughby noticed the envelope on the floor by the front door. He rubbed his eyes and glanced at the first envelope on his desk . . . and then at another envelope by the front door.

Tingling with excitement, Willoughby leaped out of his chair, hurried to the front door, and picked up the envelope. He carefully opened it.

Inside were three new crisp hundred dollar bills. Willoughby lifted his gaze to the three symbols he had etched over his door. The sun had been up for hours, and a thin shaft of light illuminated them in the comparative darkness of his apartment.

*Wealth and riches abound.* And this was just the beginning! Willoughby danced a little jig around his front room but suddenly stopped short. Zamatin! The curse.

He stuck the new envelope into his pocket, raced to the telephone, and dialed the number of Zamatin's bookshop. The shop was closed on Wednesdays, but Zamatin would be there. He was always there and he would answer the phone, if he could.

That is, if something terrible hadn't happened to him.

Three rings. Four . . .

"Zamatin's bookshop," a strained voice said.

"Mr. Zamatin?" Willoughby's voice shook.

"Yeah. What is it? What do you want?"

"Oh, you're there. . . ." Willoughby grunted with disappointment.

"Of course I'm here! Where the hell else would I be? Willoughby, is that you?"

"Why, yes it is, Mr. Zamatin."

"What do you want, Willoughby?"

"I . . . uh . . . I just wondered if everything was all right. You sound different."

"No, I'm not all right, Willoughby!" Zamatin shouted into the receiver. "I was climbing on that stool to get a book off the top shelf and the damn thing broke! I broke my arm, twisted my back all out of whack, and sprained my ankle! Wait a minute, Willoughby. How did you know? Willoughby!"

Willoughby hung up the phone, closed his eyes, and said, "Thank you, Matthew Maule."

But what about the powder? The powder from which comes the power of flight. Where could it be?

In the second envelope, of course. Willoughby reached inside his pocket and pulled out the envelope that contained the hundred-dollar bills. At the bottom of the envelope was a small bag full of fine white powder.

This is it, Willoughby thought. This is it. The three hundred

dollars . . . Zamatin . . . and now the power of flight.

He was so excited that he nearly spilled the powder as he quickly poured it into the glass of water, which he downed in two fast gulps.

Willoughby sat in his desk chair and waited for something to happen. These things take time. . . . Minutes passed.

His body began to feel numbed, but it somehow throbbed with a tingling like electricity coursing through it. Willoughby's mouth was dry, and he licked his lips. Very dry. He loosened another button on his shirt. The powder. It was working. He tried to focus his eyes on the parchment in front of him. *From POWDER comes POWER OF FLIGHT*. The words whirled around, and flashes of bright-colored lights exploded in his eyes. It was working. He'd never felt this way before. Something was definitely happening to him. He felt light. His arms seemed to float by themselves to the ceiling. He nodded his head in an intoxicated stupor and slowly, clumsily, got out of his chair. The room swirled in noisy confusion as he made his way to the window. Sweat rolled down his face and into the open neck of his shirt.

"From powder comes power!" he shouted as he threw open the window and climbed precariously up on the ledge. Perched there, he swayed for an unsteady moment and shouted down at the street. "Power! From powder comes POWER!" He lost his balance and nearly slipped off the ledge. He balanced himself against the side of the window with his other hand and pointed an accusing finger at the small group of people who were gazing up at him in horror. "Power!"

And then Willoughby jumped.

**M**r. Zamatin listened with pleasure to the five o'clock news. The lead story concerned a Willoughby Birnbaum, a deeply disturbed little man who had leaped from the thirteenth story window of his apartment in an apparent drug-induced suicide.

Zamatin rubbed his hands together with satisfaction and now wondered how he could convince that old lady Flaherty to kill her damn dog.



# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Photograph by Jacob Riis/Museum of the City of New York

Definitely not one of your cheerier picnic crowds. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the November Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

# Kelso at the Red Dragon

by Malcolm McClintick



Illustration by George Thompson

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The heavyset man in the tan suit and brown tie ate ponderously, playing with his food as if not hungry, while opposite him the thin weasel-like man shoveled his food quickly into his small mouth, devouring everything rapidly as if famished. They sat in a back corner of Wong's Red Dragon, and shared dinner for two: egg rolls, wonton soup, sweet and sour pork, fried rice, hot tea. It was nine minutes before noon on Thursday, the fifth of June, and the restaurant was filled with its lunch-time business crowd.

It was not possible to hear what the two men said to each other, even from the next booth, because of their low tones and because of the surrounding loud buzz of conversation, the banging and shouting from the kitchen, and, pervading all, the tape Jimmy Wong always played containing twenty-seven authentic Chinese songs sung by a female with a highpitched singsong voice.

After a time, the thin weasel-like man shoved his plate to one side, drained his teacup, slid out of the booth, and walked rapidly through the noisy restaurant to the front. He paid his check without smiling or speaking and hurriedly left the restaurant.

Ten minutes later a young

Chinese-American waiter named Jack burst into the owner's office where Jimmy Wong sat behind his desk enjoying a bowl of noodles. Wong, who did not like waiters disturbing him in the middle of his lunch, looked up sharply and said, "Well?"

"There's a dead man in my booth," the waiter announced breathlessly.

Wong stopped eating and blinked. "A customer? Dead?"

"Yes, sir. Dead. I think he has been shot."

Wong sighed, nodded, and reached for his phone. As he dialed the police emergency number he thought: it's not fair. If someone is going to get himself shot, why does he have to do it in my restaurant? The Fates are unkind to me.

Susan Overstreet, in halter top and shorts, bent down to examine the spider. Sergeant George Kelso of the city police department, in khakis, a madras sport shirt, and crepe-soled shoes, watched from a distance. The early afternoon sun gleamed on the creature's huge egg-shaped abdomen, highlighting its yellow and black markings.

"Yuk," Susan said, drawing back. "What do you think I should do with it?" She ran slender fingers through her

blondè hair and narrowed her dark brown eyes.

"Absolutely nothing," Kelso said.

"But it's so big, and yukky."

"It's only a garden spider. They eat insects, not people."

Nervously, she glanced down at it again. "What's that funny zigzag stuff?"

"Just part of its web," he told her, trying for the fourth or fifth time to light his pipe but the breeze blew out his match again. "Some people call them Chinese writing spiders because they think that zigzag stuff looks like Chinese writing." He recalled a time in his childhood when he'd been deathly afraid of such spiders for exactly that reason. When I was young, he thought. He patted his belly. And not so fat.

"I could just drop a brick on it," Susan said. "Why don't you go in the house, George, and I'll drop a brick on it."

"You have this instinctive urge to kill, don't you? Why can't you just leave it alone?"

Inside the house, which belonged to Susan's aunt, a telephone rang. After a moment Aunt Eleanor poked her head out of an open window. "George? It's your office."

Kelso frowned. "I was about to take Susan somewhere for lunch."

"There's been a murder," Aunt Eleanor said, with great relish.

"At something called The Red Dragon. You're to see the owner, Jimmy Wong."

It isn't fair, he thought. They always interrupt my lunch. He sighed. "I suppose I'd better go see about it. Susan, you'll have to take a rain check."

"Hmph." Susan folded her arms across her chest in her typical display of irritation.

"And don't bother that spider," he called as he strode out to the street toward his VW.

When Kelso pulled the little yellow Beetle into the parking lot of Wong's Red Dragon, he saw a marked patrol car already parked at the entrance, its emergency lights flashing, and a uniformed cop outside the double red doors. He got out and went past the cop, a young officer named McCready, and into the lobby. Kelso was a regular; Jimmy Wong hurried up, looking grave, and spoke to him at once in educated Hong Kong English with only a trace of accent.

"Mr. Kelso, I am glad you are here. It is terrible, what has happened here in my restaurant. My customers are upset. The body is still in the booth. Can you have it taken away now?" Wong was short, well-dressed, and businesslike, but it was obvious that he was having trouble staying calm.

"I can't yet," Kelso replied kindly. "It'll have to be examined first. Where are the customers?"

"I tried to keep them inside, but they wanted to leave. So they are in back, in the banquet room, and I am giving them their lunches free." Wong shrugged his narrow shoulders. "I am losing much money, but they are still here. Perhaps the police will reimburse me?"

"Sure. Just send the bill to my boss, Lieutenant Leill."

"Leill? I thought you told me he is a creep?"

"Let's go see the body," Kelso said.

The man in the rear corner booth was obese, probably over two hundred pounds, double chins, bulging stomach, sloping shoulders. He was leaning slightly against the wall to his left, and his eyes were almost closed, as if he were nearly asleep. One thick-fingered hand still rested on the white tablecloth, loosely holding a fork; the other hand lay in his lap. Some sweet and sour pork and some fried rice remained on his plate, and there was tea in his cup, water in his glass. He wore a tan business suit, white shirt, brown tie. Just over the coat pocket a dark reddish stain, amazingly like ketchup, had spread.

"Everything will have to be checked out," Kelso said. "Pic-

tures, fingerprints, stuff like that. Obviously there was another person eating with him because here's an empty plate, cup, and water glass." He glanced around the restaurant. The main dining area was deserted. Along the far wall near the kitchen several waiters, waitresses, and cooks stood in a silent row, watching expressionlessly. "I'll want to talk to your employees," Kelso added. "Also anybody who was sitting close by when it happened. That hole in his coat looks more like a puncture than a bullet hole. Did anybody hear a shot?"

"Very noisy in here at lunch," Wong said, shaking his head at the corpse. "Cooks yell all the time. Waiters, waitresses drop things, there is much banging, crashing, clanging. Probably no one heard anything, but you can ask."

"Here comes my wonderful partner," Kelso announced. "You don't know him, but you'll like him. He's pleasant, outgoing, and polite."

A small, dark, sullen man approached, glared at the fat man's body, then glared at Kelso and said moodily: "What are you standing around for, Kelso? Why aren't you investigating?"

"This is Detective Sergeant Meyer," Kelso said. "Meyer, this is Jimmy Wong, owner of Wong's Red Dragon."

"I am honored to meet a friend

of George Kelso," Wong said, bowing slightly and holding out his hand.

Meyer shook it, a little reluctantly, and scowled. "Yeah. Okay. Well, who did it, Kelso?"

"I don't know yet," Kelso said pleasantly.

"Then why don't you do something to find out?"

Kelso had learned to ignore Meyer when he was in his especially foul moods. "I'll go question the customers," he said, then glanced at Wong and added, "Could I have an egg roll?"

Wong headed for the kitchen, glaring at the personnel lined up by the kitchen door. "Get back to work," he told them in Chinese. "This is not a vacation. More customers will arrive soon. I need one egg roll, hurry!" He clapped his hands.

Meyer stood alone and frowned at the body. "Who shot you, fat man?" he muttered. But the fat man made no reply.

**A**ccording to various cards and papers in his wallet and pockets, the fat man's name was Herbert Allen Gross and he lived in a furnished apartment in one of the newer suburbs. He was fifty-two years old, stood five feet ten inches tall, and weighed two hundred fifteen pounds. He worked as a service represent-

ative for a large computer company. He'd left his organs to science. He possessed a public library card, two bank cards, an American Express card, two department store cards, a gasoline credit card, and a driver's license. His wallet held seventy-three dollars in bills, and in one trouser pocket was a crumpled five-dollar bill, three quarters, two dimes, a nickel, and two pennies. In another pocket were keys.

Kelso questioned the young waiter, Jack Liang, who had served the fat man and later discovered him dead.

"It is terrible," Jack said. He was tall and slender, and wore his black hair rather long but neatly combed. "I go back to see if they need anything, and there he is, blood on his jacket, dead."

"Did you know for sure he was dead?" Kelso asked, making notes.

"Not at first. But he was not moving, he was not breathing, and he was still. He, you know, *looked dead*."

"You said you went to see if they needed anything. There was a second customer in the booth, right?"

"Yes, sir. Skinny guy. I don't know his name, but he's in here before, many times. I can point him out to you. Skinny guy and the fat man, they eat here a lot together, you know? Maybe they

work in same place or something."

"Both regulars." Kelso made another note. Already, the case was maddeningly simple, yet maddeningly difficult. Who but the skinny guy could have murdered the fat man? But there would be no way to prove it, he had a feeling, there would be no proof at all. He visualized the cold gray eyes of Lieutenant Leill glaring at him across the desk as he demanded to know where the proof was. Two men eat in a booth. One leaves, then the other is discovered murdered. The inference is that the first man did it—but where is the proof? A smart-talking lawyer would bark the question over and over again at the jury: "Where's the proof?" "We find the defendant not guilty," the jury foreman would announce. And Leill would glare and fume.

"Both regulars," Jack Liang echoed. "Fat man always have fried rice, no matter what. Skinny guy change it a little, sometime he split dinner for two with the fat man like today, other time he has egg foo young, pepper steak, maybe even hot spicy dish. But the fat man liked fried rice."

"He didn't eat much today," Kelso said, regarding the dead man's dinner plate. "He left most of his food. Is that typical?"

Jack shook his head. "No, usually he eat like a pig. Order dinner, eat dinner, then order again. He eat two dinners. Today he order only one and not even finish that. Every time I go to check he just sitting there, playing with his food, he push it around on plate with his fork." The waiter shrugged. "Maybe he just break up with another girlfriend."

"Did he have a lot of girlfriends?"

"I don't like to talk, you know, say bad things about dead man. But this man all the time like Oriental girl, you know? He flirt with waitresses in here. For a while he flirt with my own girl, and she even date him for a few weeks. I think maybe he pay her lots of money. Then Mr. Wong, he fire her. Bad reputation for restaurant." Jack lowered his voice and added, very softly, "But please don't say I tell you such a thing, okay?"

**K**elso questioned the other workers, but no one knew anything. He spoke to the customers who had sat near the fat man—two car salesmen from a dealership across the road, a young married couple vacationing with relatives before returning home to Chicago, an elderly woman eating alone. No



one had heard anything like a gunshot, no one had seen anything out of the ordinary.

He thought about the dead man. What would it have been like to grow up with a name like that? Gross—it fit the man now; had it always? Had he become so fat as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy? And how had it affected his personality? The young waiter had hinted that Gross paid girls for their services. Did that have anything to do with the skinny guy and Gross's murder?

No proof, Kelso thought, sadly shaking his head. Maybe the skinny guy didn't do it, but it's a strange coincidence—he gets up and leaves just before the fat man is found dead. Also, he thought, the fat man wasn't eating his dinner, which was abnormal. Usually he ate two dinners, but not today. Possibly he knew something was about to happen to him.

Meyer tapped him on the shoulder.

"I've got some dope on Gross," the detective sergeant said, frowning at his notebook. "He was a bigshot in a computer company. Traveled around, including two years in Hong Kong. Learned some Chinese, married a local, brought her back here and divorced her. Last week he got promoted. He and the skinny guy, whose name

turns out to be Capetanopoulos—

"What?"

"Capetanopoulos. Greek guy. First name Mark. So anyway, Gross and this Greek guy worked for the same outfit. The regional director's position was up for grabs, and it was between the two of them. The one who lost out was to be transferred out to the west coast, to Seattle. In effect, a demotion. All the Greek's family live here, and he badly wanted the job. But they gave it to Gross."

Kelso sighed heavily. "You think Cantanopolis murdered Gross over a job promotion?"

"Why not? It's happened before. And it's Capetanopoulos. At least *try* to pronounce names correctly. Well, I've put out the word to have the Greek guy picked up for questioning."

"No proof," Kelso muttered.

"What?"

"I said, no proof. You can pick him up, but there's no proof. He ate lunch with the fat guy, and he left the restaurant, then a waiter found the body. But unless the Greek guy has the murder weapon on him—"

"He won't," Meyer said. "They found it in a trash dumpster out in back about ten minutes ago. And guess what it was?"

"Something small," Kelso said. "Twenty-two automatic with a silencer?"

"No. It was a dart gun."

"You're kidding."

"Nope. A dart gun. Very high-powered spring, small needle-like darts. Thing shoots a needle about the size of a three-inch nail fifty feet with high velocity and good accuracy. Some of the gangs are starting to use them because they don't make any noise to speak of."

Kelso nodded grimly. "That explains the absence of a loud noise, and the tiny wound. Have they examined the body yet?"

"Yeah. The needle was in his chest. Just penetrated the heart. Doc says he probably died within two or three minutes. No prints on the gun, it'd been wiped clean. Well, I'm having him pulled in anyway. Maybe he'll crack under pressure."

"The fat man didn't eat his lunch," Kelso murmured.

"Huh?"

"He just sat there and played with his food."

"What are you babbling about, Kelso?"

"What would you do, Meyer, if you were eating lunch with a guy who showed you a gun and said he was going to shoot you right there in your booth?"

"I'd jump up and run like hell."

"What if you were too frightened to jump up and run? What if you were certain there was no escape? What if you thought

all you could do was to sit there and wait for the killer to pull the trigger?"

"I don't know," Meyer said. He shook his head, scowling. "But I wouldn't just sit there. What are you getting at?"

"He played with his food," Kelso said. "I'm going to go look at some pictures."

"You're getting crazier every day, Kelso. Take my advice, find a good shrink. They can help people like you." Meyer wandered off, muttering to himself.

**K**elso reentered the main dining room, where, now that the fat man's body had finally been removed, customers once more were filing in. The lunch rush on a weekday would last till two or so, and it was only one thirty now. Kelso strolled back to the corner booth in the rear. Following instructions from Meyer, the booth had not been set up again. For a time Kelso gazed at the empty white cloth spread over the table, then left the room and went outside.

A few yards from the double red doors, the big white crime-lab van was parked. Leaning against it was a tall blond man puffing at a cigarette.

"Bremer. How's it going?"

"Oh, hello, Kelso. Not bad. We didn't find much. How about this, a guy getting iced in a res-

restaurant booth with a needle gun. Weird, huh?"

"Yeah. Listen, how did the pictures turn out?"

"They haven't been developed yet, except for some Polaroids we took for backup. Crazy Al, that's my partner, always takes a few with a Polaroid, just in case."

"Can I see them?"

Bremer shrugged and ground out his cigarette butt with his shoe. "Sure. Hey, Al, let's see those Polaroids!"

Someone inside the van handed out an envelope, and Bremer passed it to Kelso, who found a dozen photos inside, pictures of Herbert Gross in death. Shots from a distance, shots from close up, shots of the table, the seats, the walls, the needle wound, the plates and cups and glasses the two men had used. Kelso examined them closely, then returned them to Bremer.

"When you get the others developed, I'd like three enlargements, as large as possible without losing the detail."

Bremer glanced at the shots Kelso indicated. "A plate with food?"

Kelso nodded.

**T**hey were in Leill's office, listening to the roar of the ancient air conditioner. Behind his desk,

Leill glared with hard gray eyes, a look of disgust on his hard features. Detective Sergeant Meyer leaned casually against a wall, smoking a cigarette and watching the air conditioner as if waiting for it to take off. In a small hard-backed chair Kelso sat uneasily, playing with his pipe, which he'd lit several times but couldn't keep going. After some time, Leill spoke:

"Listen, Kelso, I'm not going to wait all afternoon. This Conapopolis guy—"

"Capetanopoulos," Kelso corrected politely.

Leill glared. "Whatever. This Greek guy's been picked up. He ate his lunch with the fat man. He finished. He was in a hurry, so he left. He doesn't know a thing. He's hired the biggest law firm in town, and they all play golf with the mayor. I'm getting all kinds of pressure from upstairs to file a charge or cut this guy loose. I can't file a charge. His prints aren't on that weird gun they found. He got the fat man's job, that's all. That's no proof."

"Sir—" Kelso began.

"Where's the proof, Kelso?"

Leill pounded a heavy fist on his green blotter. "Where's the proof?"

"If you could just wait—"

Someone knocked at the door. It came first as a faint tapping,

then louder. Kelso jumped up, pocketed his pipe, and pulled open the door. He smiled.

"Hello, sir," said Jack Liang.

"Come on in, Jack. Lieutenant Leill, this is Jack Liang. He's a waiter at Wong's Red Dragon, and he waited on Herbert Gross and Mark Capetanopoulos today at lunch."

"What's this about?" Leill snapped.

"Kelso needs therapy," Meyer murmured.

Kelso opened a manila envelope he'd brought with him and took out three photos. "These are nine by twelve enlargements of pictures taken at the scene by the lab guys," he said. "As you can see, they're closeups of a dinner plate. Capetanopoulos ate all his food, but Herbert Gross only played with his. He left most of it. This is his plate, the way it was found."

"Kelso," Leill said impatiently, "is there some point to all this?"

"Yes, sir. There is. As you can see, Gross's fried rice has been spread around on his plate in various little clumps." Kelso handed the enlargements across to Leill, who laid them on his blotter and glared at them.

"Yes? So?"

"Herbert Gross sat there," Kelso said, "knowing he was about to die. He couldn't leave

the booth, it was too late. He wanted to name his murderer. So he did."

Leill frowned intensely at the photographs. "I don't see any names on here, Kelso."

"No, sir, you can't. Not unless you can read Chinese."

"What?"

"Gross spent two years in Hong Kong and learned some Chinese," Kelso said. "See how he positioned his little rice grains, sir? He played with his food, but he wasn't really playing, not after a while. Those grains of rice, pushed together in just the right way, form Chinese characters. I wondered if they really meant anything, so I asked Jack here, who of course reads Chinese, to look at the photographs."

Slowly, Leill raised his hard gray eyes to level them at Jack Liang.

"You've seen these pictures, Mr. Liang?"

"No, sir. Not yet." He seemed nervous under Leill's hard gaze.

"This is nuts," Meyer stated. "Nobody writes with rice."

"Shut up, Meyer," said Leill. He handed an enlargement to the young waiter. "Take a look at that. Do those clumps of rice mean something in Chinese?"

Liang studied the photograph. Then, quietly, he answered: "Yes, sir. Mean something, definitely. Little

hard to make out at first, but once I see it, pretty obvious, sir."

Kelso felt his pulse rate quicken. Leill heaved a huge sigh and clasped his large hands together, gazing intently at the waiter. Over the rattle of the air conditioner, the lieutenant asked:

"And what do Gross's clumps of rice mean? Are you going to tell me he was able to spell out a name like Capetanopoulos?"

"Oh, no, sir," Jack Liang replied. "But he is able quite easily to spell out something else. His rice say, 'Killed by skinny Greek.'"

Meyer stared. Leill seemed speechless, then reached for his phone.

"I'll have the Greek charged," he said.

"Wait a minute, sir," Kelso said quickly. "That won't be necessary. Liang is lying."

Everyone looked at Kelso. Liang wiped sweat from his high forehead, and his eyes seemed to darken even more than normal, into total blackness.

"I'm sorry, Jack," Kelso said, "but that's not what Herbert Gross's rice clumps say, and you know it as well as I do."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that it's lucky you didn't notice the man's plate when you were still in the res-

taurant, before the police got there, or you would've destroyed the evidence, and then I would've had no proof at all. But you didn't notice it in time. Gross wasn't hungry, probably he was having a very uncomfortable dinner with Capetanopoulos, the man whose job he'd just taken. But Capetanopoulos didn't kill him. Probably he told him what he thought of him and then left. When Gross was alone, you went back to his booth. He'd taken your girlfriend away from you. Worse, he'd paid her, in effect turning her into a prostitute, something that must have enraged you. Using a needle gun, you fired a needle into his chest and hurried away."

"This man does not know what he says," the waiter said loudly. His eyes were slits.

"Gross didn't die immediately. He must have known he'd been fatally wounded. There wasn't time to do much, but in the couple of minutes he had left he pushed his rice around on his plate and formed Chinese characters."

Leill cleared his throat. "Kelso, is this just more accusation, or do you have any proof?"

Kelso reached into his pocket and pulled out a rectangular peice of paper. He handed it to Leill. "Sir, this is a dinner check

from Wong's Red Dragon. At the top, where it says SERVER, there is a Chinese character. Jack Liang was the waiter when this dinner was eaten. It's the Greek's check. Next to the Chinese character is a number, which Jimmy Wong no doubt has recorded somewhere as being Jack Liang's number. That character is Jack Liang's name in Chinese, and it's the Chinese character Herbert Gross formed all over his dinner plate, again and again, with his rice, while he was dying, naming the man who had just killed him. Jack Liang."

The waiter screamed something in Chinese and flung himself at Kelso. For an instant Kelso felt real fear; then Meyer had the waiter from behind and pulled him off, pinning his arms behind him. Kelso quickly handcuffed him.

"You should never try that in a police station," Meyer said.

**K**elso stood at the side of the house in the late evening and peered down at the ground. After a time he saw the spider, which had captured a beetle

and was busy wrapping it in silk. Susan came up behind him, a large ceramic mug of coffee in one hand.

"So here's where you got to. What are you doing, George, pestering that poor spider again?"

"You're the one who wanted to drop a brick on it."

"I know. I still do." She sipped from her mug. "Look—it's made more of that zigzag stuff."

"Chinese writing," Kelso told her. "There's a story about it. If one of these spiders writes your name in Chinese, you'll die."

"Now I'll probably have nightmares. I wonder what it does say. It's not really Chinese, is it?" Draining the mug, she stooped for a closer look.

"Sure it is." Kelso bent down, too, and squinted. "I learned some Chinese in the army, maybe I can make this out." He paused, then stood up. "Huh."

"What is it, George? What does it say?"

"It's a name. Hard to make out, but I think it says . . . Susan . . . Overstreet . . ."

Then he ran, but not fast enough to avoid the flying mug.



by Loren D. Estleman

**D**eborah Stonesmith was a tall black woman with auburn-tinted hair sprayed into hard waves and heavy hips tastefully disguised under a tailored gray herringbone suit. The steel desk in her office just came to her knees when she rose like a man to grasp my hand. The gesture didn't seem out of place at all; but for a spray of daisies in a cut-glass vase on the desk, the room might have belonged to any of the male detectives in the squad. When we were seated,

she put on a pair of gold-rimmed glasses hanging from a chain around her neck to read my I.D., then took them off and returned the folder and leaned back in her yellow leather swivel, steepling a pair of surprisingly slender hands without a ring or long nails.

"What brings you down to Major Crimes, Mr. Walker?"

Her voice fell around the middle register, a little hoarse at the edges like a saloon singer's. I said:

"I'm working for Midwest Life,



Automobile & Casualty this month. Stan Draper there hired me to look into this Gendron kill that went down Tuesday. Gendron's wife stands to collect a quarter million on the double indemnity clause, and it's Midwest's policy, excuse the expression, to investigate all claims above fifty thousand. I understand it's your case."

She smiled tightly. "How is Stan?"

"Three sheets to the wind, same as always. You know him?"

"We pulled stakeout together once when I was in uniform. That was before they broke him for keeping a pint of Ten High in the glove compartment." She turned the chair to the left and back again. "We made a collar in the Gendron case this morning. This kid tried to buy a tape deck at a Radio Shack downtown with bills on the hot serial-number list. He's rolling over on his partners right now."

"I heard. When can I talk to him?"

"Not until after he's arraigned, and maybe not even then. The P.D. on this one's a real nutcracker, and I'm not going to stray from the book and take a chance on blowing it all over some technicality. We got a textbook arrest on a drugstore heist and the murder of an innocent bystander, and that's how it's going to stay."

I tapped a Winston out of my pack and spiked it between my lips. "I'd like to see the autopsy report on Gendron."

"So would I. We're still waiting on it. All I've got so far is the bullet that killed him, a .38. The kid didn't have a gun on him when we picked him up, and his apartment is clean, if you call a drawerful of controlled substances and a stack of naughty pictures clean. He says it was one of the others pulled the trigger. I would, too."

"Yeah. Did you ever find out what a PR consultant was doing in a drugstore in the middle of the morning on a weekday?"

"Getting cigarettes, his secretary said. Look, you think his wife sent him there to get squiffed? One of the scroats popped him in front of four witnesses on their way out the door."

"The questions have to get asked." I lit up and flipped the match into the glass ashtray on the desk. "This kid got a sheet?"

She fingered her eyeglasses, smiling the tight smile. "Three disorderlies and a shoplifting. Copped a pair of nylon panties from the downtown Hudson's, when there was a downtown Hudson's. His size. Did I say those pictures we found in his apartment were all of men?"

"Not exactly Machine Gun Kelly."

"These days you don't have

to be. All it takes is an expensive hobby, like doing pills and cruising the gay bars on Woodward."

"Any provocation for the shooting?"

"Witnesses say no. Just another goodbye kill. We get them."

"Was Gendron killed instantly?"

"Twelve paces, straight through the heart."

"They're getting better."

"I've got a ballistics expert wants his autograph."

I burned some more tobacco. Then I squashed out my butt half-smoked and rose. "Thanks, inspector. I hope you get the others."

"We will. We don't see many mysteries in Major Crimes. You see Stan, tell him Deb said hi."

The Gendron house stood in St. Clair Shores a block off the lake, really just a broad spot in the Detroit River where rich people from Grosse Pointe with nothing better to do sail catamarans and worry about their putting. It was a brick colonial with a midget windmill on the front lawn and a yellow Citroën parked behind a black Camaro in the circular driveway. I parked behind the Citroën and got out, and when I rang the doorbell, a tall party with receding gray hair answered. He

had on a camel-hair sport coat over a white turtleneck and black wool peg-topped pants. His face was tanned.

"I'm Amos Walker," I said, before he could say, "Yes-s?"; and handed him a card. "I'm an investigator with the late Mr. Gendron's insurance underwriters. I wonder if I might ask Mrs. Gendron a few questions."

"I doubt it." His gaze fell somewhere behind me. It was a powder-blue gaze. What color it was behind the contacts was anybody's guess.

I said, "It has to do with whether or not Midwest pays off her claim."

"Mrs. Gendron is under sedation. I'm Dr. Redding, the family—her physician." He made the change with a slight twitch of his very black eyebrows. They looked lacquered on: "Perhaps later, when the shock has worn off—"

"Did you know Mr. Gendron well?"

"Very. He was my friend before he was my patient."

"Maybe I could talk to you."

He moved his eyebrows, then stood aside to let me in. The living room was done in beige, with blond furniture and a twist of bleached driftwood resting on the mantel of a pale stone fireplace. A bloodless room, professionally decorated. He offered me the ivory-colored sofa

and helped himself to a thin cigar from his inside breast pocket.

"Shocking habit, especially for a doctor." He lit it with a Zippo and got a Winston burning for me. I noticed he chewed his nails. "We're as weak as everyone else."

"Didn't I see your name in Gendron's file?"

"I conducted his physical when he applied for the policy last year."

"Was that the last time you examined him?"

"No, I gave him his annual just six weeks ago. He was in excellent condition for a man of forty, though he could've stood to lose ten pounds."

"Every doctor says that. You knew him socially?"

"Dick and I became friends when he was a freshman at Michigan and I was interning in the hospital there. I introduced him to his wife." He flipped some ash into the ashtray on the blond coffee table.

"How was he emotionally?"

"In good spirits. Maybe a little harried. Public relations is a cannibal profession. I've referred a number of Dick's colleagues to stress counseling. Not him, though. He coped."

I added some ash of my own to the pile. The ashtray contained two of his cigar stubs and a number of shredded cig-

arette butts with pink lipstick stains on the tips. "Would you know if he had money troubles?"

He stroked the brown underside of his chin. "Is there something suspicious about Dick's death? I thought it was established he was killed at random by some strung-out bandit."

"That's how it looks. I'm just stitching up the loose corners. People who live in nice houses like this have a tendency to go into the hole."

"I wouldn't know about that."

It sounded stiff. "Just asking," I said. "Friends usually know about those things. How were relations between him and his wife?"

"They were devoted to each other. Really, I'm curious. Does someone imagine he threw himself in front of that bullet just to cheat the insurance company?"

"It's happened."

"Not with Dick. He had too much to live for." He killed his cigar. "I think that if Lynn were standing where I am she'd be asking you to leave about now."

"He's just doing his job, Tim."

I'm some detective. I hadn't heard her entering the room through the doorway behind me. I stood and turned to look at a small brunette in her mid-thirties, wearing a pageboy haircut and a blue satin dress-

ing gown trimmed in ruffles. Her feet were bare in flat-heeled sandals, and she was without makeup but for a touch of pink on her lips. She wouldn't need much else. Her eyes were a little puffed.

"I heard you talking," she said. "I'm Lynn Gendron, Dick's—widow."

"Then you can answer the questions I was asking Dr. Redding."

"Lynn, you should be resting."

"What does it matter? Dick's the first thing I think of when I wake up. My husband was a happy man, Mr. —?"

"Walker."

She smiled her thanks sadly. "He worked hard and it took its toll on his nerves, but he liked the work and he loved me. We had the usual debts, nothing we couldn't stay on top of. The house is mortgaged and we—I owe three more payments on the car. If that's something to panic over, this whole neighborhood should be half berserk."

"That's the Camaro you owe on?" I asked.

"Yes," offered Redding. "The Citroën is mine. *All mine.*"

The cigarette was burning my fingers. I got rid of it. "It's good you still make house calls."

"Only in special cases. Lynn is a dear friend. Now, I really must insist you go. Despite what

Lynn says, time alone is the best cure for grief."

"Alone with you, you mean."

He did the trick with the eyebrows. "I think I resent that."

"When will you know?"

"Goodbye, Mr. Walker," cut in Mrs. Gendron. She sounded more tired than angry.

I thanked her for her help and left while Redding was still making the effort to be civilized.

**H**egelman Associates, advertising and public relations, occupied the twenty-second floor of the Penobscot Building, a grand old pile of granite and red marble in downtown Detroit that looked as if it was willing to tolerate all that space-age plastic going up along the riverfront, for a while longer anyway. I followed a short carpeted corridor from the elevator to a desk behind which a china doll in a stiff blouse and Max Factor directed me to Richard Gendron's offices. The woman I found there wasn't quite as pretty, but she didn't work as hard at it. I liked her slight overbite and the wisp of soft brown hair that strayed out over her forehead. She read my card and her face got drawn.

"Mr. Hegelman said someone from the insurance company would be coming by," she said quietly. "He said we should all cooperate."

Her voice broke a little. I said, "Gendron was a good boss, huh."

"He was a good *man*. When I threw out my back bending over to open a file drawer, the company tried to deny me compensation. Dick—Mr. Gendron stormed into Mr. Hegelman's office in the middle of a conference and threatened to quit if my claim wasn't honored. I got my first check two days later. He took care of his people."

"All his people, or just you?"

Her chin came up. "I'm happily married, and so was he. Ask anyone on the staff; they've all got stories just like mine. He did right by all of us, even if it meant breaking the rules."

"Sorry. I'm starting from scratch, that's all. Can I look in his office?"

She said the door was unlocked, and I went inside. It was a corner room, looking down on Griswold to the west and out on the Renaissance Center to the south, a giant poker-chip caddy with the handle gone. An original architect's drawing of the Penobscot Building hung on the east wall, and a framed studio shot of Gendron's wife Lynn shared the desk with a telephone pad and a complicated intercom. The drawers yielded pens, stationery, a paperback book, and a carton of Pall Malls.

The telephone pad was blank. I picked it up and riffled through

it. A business card slid out onto the desk. I read it.

I studied the buttons on the intercom for a minute, then gave up and went back into the outer office. Gendron's secretary looked up from her typing.

"Your boss said he was going to the store for cigarettes?"

"Yes. We had an agreement: I wouldn't try to talk him into quitting, and he wouldn't send me out to maintain his habit. We—"

"What brand did he smoke?"

"What brand? Pall Malls."

"Any thoughts on why he'd go out for cigarettes when he had a carton in his desk?"

She shook her head.

I laid the business card on top of the typewriter. The legend was embossed in tasteful blue on pebbled beige stock:

RELIANCE INVESTIGATIONS

"Courtesy, Efficiency, Confidentiality"

"What business would he have had for a private investigator?"

"It must have fallen out of the Turner file," she said, and stopped. Something fluttered across her face: a confidence betrayed.

"Who's Turner?"

"I'm sorry, I can't answer that."

"Not even if it means finding out why Gendron died?"

She looked up at me with dry

eyes. "Discretion was very important to Dick. He practiced it in everything he did. He'd want me to do the same no matter what."

"Okay." I left the card where I had put it. "Did he confide in you personally?"

"Such as what?"

"Such as his health." I brought out the paperback book I had found in Gendron's desk. A pastoral cover, doves circling a meadow in blossom, the title in gentle script: *Coping with Terminal Illness*.

She stared at it a long time. "Maybe it was someone he knew. His mother or father. Or his wife."

"Maybe. Have the police been here?"

"Just to talk. None of them went into the office."

"No need, for a simple robbery killing. Can I use your telephone? It's a local call."

She said go ahead and I dialed police headquarters and asked for Deborah Stonesmith in Major Crimes. After a minute her saloon-singer voice came on the line.

"Walker, inspector," I said. "Did that autopsy sheet come through?"

"On my desk. What do you need, if it's quick?"

"Gendron's physical condition at time of death. Was he suffering from cancer, heart

disease, anything that would snuff him if the bullet didn't?"

"Nope. I should be so healthy."

"Okay, thanks. How's the investigation?"

"Hot as hell. We found the kid's partners right where he said we would. They're being processed now."

"Names?"

"After the arraignment tomorrow morning."

I thanked her again and we were through talking. The secretary's eyes were on me. "Gendron was sound as a rock," I said.

"Surprised?"

"Only a little."

Back in my office I removed the *Free Press* movie section from the telephone and called Hal Needham at Reliance Investigations. When I wasn't working for Midwest or following someone's husband through the after-hours places downtown or looking for someone's daughter in the Cass Corridor, I sometimes farmed myself out to Reliance, and Hal and I had worked in tandem enough times to owe each other some favors. I recognized his Kansas twang as soon as he answered.

"Walker? Call you back."

The telephone rang a minute later. When I picked it up he said, "Sorry. Krell's got a tap

on all the incoming lines. This one's clean."

"How can you work for him?"

"I got a gifted daughter and I'm starting a bail fund for my son. What's the favor?"

"Guy named Richard Gendron at Hegelman Associates did some business with Reliance a while back, something to do with someone or something named Turner. I need the details."

He whistled. "It gets back to Krell he'll play the 'Rogue's March' over the office P.A. and break my men's room key over his knee."

"He won't get it from me."

"This one's worth a dinner. At least."

"You pick the place."

"Whose sheet are you on?"

"Midwest is picking up the expenses on this one."

"In that case, make it the London Chop House. Give me a half hour."

I said okay and broke the connection. Next I tried Lee Horst downtown. Lee's an information broker, and if you're on his accepted list, he'll hand you the inside track on anyone or anything in the Detroit area, provided you meet his price. He picked up the receiver himself: no secretaries or assistants to undersell Lee.

"Timothy Redding," he repeated in his high soft voice,

after I had told him what I needed. "M.D.?"

"Yeah. I want his finances, but if you find anything else juicy, I'll take that, too."

"I'll get back to you."

The counter down the street from my building served me a three-course dinner—tuna fish sandwich, coffee, and a bill—and I unlocked the door to my office again just as the telephone started ringing. It was Hal Needham.

"Turner Chemicals," he said.

"They went to Hegelman looking for a better public image, and Gendron got the assignment. He observed their operation for a month and made recommendations that included a dress code for office personnel and a pink slip for the dispatcher in their Warren plant."

"How come the canning?"

"Gendron didn't think it was good business practice to keep an armed robber on the payroll. Guy's name was Phil Hardy, and he had priors going back to the riots. Also, he was driving a new red Pontiac Firebird that he didn't buy on a dispatcher's salary."

"I like that part," I said. "I like it a lot. Tomorrow night okay for the chop house?"

"I'm not eating a bite until then." He laughed shortly and hung up.



Lee Horst didn't call back that day. I dialed my service and asked them to reroute all calls to my home telephone, then closed the office. At home I watched a little TV, dealt myself a couple of losing games of Solitaire, and turned in early. All that dialing can really take it out of you.

**I**n the morning I showered, dressed, and turned on the radio for the news while the coffee was brewing. When the announcer had finished with Washington and the Middle East, he noted that three men had been arraigned ten minutes before in Recorder's Court in connection with Tuesday's drugstore robbery and the murder of Richard Gendron. He gave two names I didn't recognize and we pronounced the third one together. Philip Hardy.

Stonesmith was a few minutes getting rid of the reporters and coming to the telephone. I congratulated her on the arrests. She said, "Save it for the convictions. Jay Albert Matthews represented them at the arraignment."

Matthews had defended a millionaire's daughter or two and written a bestselling book, *Mistakes of Darrow* or something on that order. "Who's paying him?" I asked.

"Privileged information, he

said. It sure isn't any of those three."

"I think I know."

"Well, spill it."

"Privileged information, inspector."

I hung up on whatever name she was calling me and lifted the receiver again and got Lee Horst just as he was entering his office. He apologized for not calling.

"Computer was down, and isn't that the most popular new lie this season?" Keys clattered on his end. "Okay, I got a read-out on Dr. Redding. You want it over the phone or on paper?"

I said over the telephone was fine, and smoked two cigarettes while he was feeding it to me. When he was through, I asked him how much.

"For you, a hundred."

"You're a fraud, Lee."

"My informants like to eat, what can I say?"

I promised to get a check off to him that week. Then I went out without finishing my coffee.

**T**he yellow Citroën was parked in the same spot behind Lynn Gendron's Camaro when I climbed out of my own crate. It might not have moved since yesterday, but Redding was too discreet for that. A discreet fellow was Dr. Redding.

"What now?"

He had shed the camel-hair for a sober blue serge suit and knitted black necktie. This time he stood across the doorway with his feet spread, a graying sentinel with a Palm Beach tan. I said, "We can go inside or we can talk out here. My voice carries."

After a beat he let me pass. Gendron's widow was sitting on the sofa in a snug-fitting black dress that caught her just below the knees. A pair of gray cotton gloves lay on the coffee table in front of her, next to a barrel glass half full of amber liquid.

"Dick's funeral is this morning," Redding closed the door. "Can't this wait until after?"

"What'd you tell him, cancer?" I said.

His lacquered eyebrows squirmed. "What?"

"Cancer, probably. It's a buzzword, bound to have the extreme effect you were after. How deep are you in debt really, Redding? My information says six figures."

"Are you drunk? You're babbling."

"This is a computer society. Everything's on record. Your house in Grosse Pointe has a third mortgage, and you dumped a ton of preferred stock at a loss to keep the loan sharks happy downtown. You're into the IRS for sixty grand, you owe every bookie between here and Miami.

You told me the truth about your car, though; you own that, at least until the government or some guy named Big Tony the Hippo seizes it."

"Keep talking," he said. "You're constructing an iron-clad case for slander and invasion of privacy."

"You need that quarter-million insurance money, Redding. It means surviving or staying out of jail. Depending on which of your creditors gets to you first. Murder was a little out of your reach, and since your old friend Gendron wasn't going to accommodate you by committing suicide, you decided to supply him with a good reason. So when you gave him his last physical, you told him he had terminal cancer."

"Now I know you've been drinking. He was in excellent health."

"You knew that, but he didn't. The symptoms of stress can be made to seem like the early stages of something much more serious, and he trusted you enough not to get a second opinion from another doctor. I found a well-thumbed self-help book in his office about living with death. It didn't take, though. With your help he chose a sudden end over letting his insides rot away slowly."

Redding smiled grimly. "Very inventive, but you forgot one

thing. Suicide would have voided the policy."

"Only if it looked like suicide. Being an old friend, you planted a simple idea in Gendron's head: set up your own murder. He pulled the file on a man named Phil Hardy, a man he'd persuaded a client of his to fire in the interest of a better public image, a known armed robber who would organize the hit for an inducement—something up front, say, plus whatever he got away with from the robbery and a good attorney if he got caught.

"Jay Albert Matthews is the direct link. Gendron could supply the advance payment, but you had to hire Matthews to represent Hardy and his partners because Gendron wouldn't be around to do it once he kept his appointment in that drugstore, and if you reneged on the deal, they'd spill the details. The law says Matthews doesn't have to divulge his client's name, but once it gets out you set the whole thing up, he'll turn you in to save his own reputation. Lawyers are like that. That's where you went sour, Redding. You didn't have the guts to arrange the kill yourself, so you let Gendron do it. Only in the end you had to get your hands dirty, too."

"I wasn't Dick's beneficiary, Walker. Lynn was."

I looked at her on the sofa. "He's trying to lay it off on you."

The skin of her face drew tight. "The hell he will."

"Shut up, Lynn."

"I guess she's in love with you, or thinks she is," I said. "Otherwise, she wouldn't have gone along with it. A divorce would only have given her part interest in a car with three payments to go on it and half a house with a mortgage, but her husband's death by misadventure was good for a quarter million. It would make a nice dowry when you two got married after a suitable interval. Don't move, Redding. Let's keep my gun in my belt holster and this conversation civilized."

"Don't be melodramatic. I was just reaching for a cigar."

"That's another thing. You really should have emptied the ashtray in your Citroën. I took the liberty of inspecting it on my way up to the door just now. The pink lipstick on the cigarette butts I found there isn't your shade. Bet there are more in your house."

"You're a man."

I looked again at Mrs. Gendron. Her glass was empty now, but she was still holding it, her knuckles white. "You don't know what it's like being married to a dull man in a dull job who never took a chance in his life. Dick was horribly, stultifyingly

*dependable*. Try living with that."

"Don't say anything," Redding warned her. "Matthews won't talk, and Hardy and the others don't know either of us from Adam."

"You should be grateful he was so dependable." I lifted the receiver off the telephone near the door and used that same hand to dial police headquarters, keeping my gun hand free and my eyes on Redding. "Gendron took his responsibilities seriously, and hang the rules. That's why he tried to see that you got his insurance money. He took chances, all right, but not like yours. All of his were for other people."

The police switchboard put me through to Major Crimes.

**"M**atthews won't turn," Deborah Stonessmith said. "Why should he? He's not guilty of anything but being a lawyer. Even if he did talk, it wouldn't prove anything."

We were seated in her office, waiting for the stenographer who had taken my statement to finish typing it up so I could sign it. The inspector had on a

light blue suit today, over a white ruffled blouse that on her looked like a lace doily on an armored car. She was playing with the glasses on the chain around her neck.

I said, "Keep working on the Gendron woman. She might crack."

"More likely it'll be Redding. A funny thing happens in these unequal partnerships when they go into Interrogation: they reverse roles. The strong one spills his guts, and the weak one clams up tight. If it happens at all."

"In any case, Midwest saves having to pay off. If your hunch is right and Hardy folds on Gendron, it's suicide any way you slice it."

"So why aren't you happy?" she asked.

"Why aren't you?"

She smiled. There was no joy in it. The light of a gray Detroit sort of day came through the window at her back and painted a red nimbus around her head of hard hair. "So it was just an ordinary domestic murder after all. Not a major crime."

"They're all major," I said, admiring her halo through the smoke of my Winston. "Every last one of them."

FICTION

# Grant the Artist His Subject



by Harold D. Kaiser

*"We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donné: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it."—Henry James*

**M**itch Reilley slumped behind the wheel of his battered 1978 Ford and watched the evening sun cutting its way down through the smog. He was also watching a shabby frame house with two garbage cans standing in front of it. He had been watching the house for an hour, ever since the man he had been following entered it. So far the most interesting thing happening was that a stray dog had come along and was dispiritedly rooting in one of the garbage cans. Mitch could count the bones in its tail from where he sat. It nosed through the garbage as if it did not expect to get fat on what it found in the cans. Mitch sympathized with the dog, but he had already finished the last of the cold hamburgers. He was reasonably sure it would not be interested in cold coffee with congealed cream.

Illustration by Peter D. Fasolino

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Suddenly Mitch slumped a little farther in his seat. The front door had opened and the man he was following came out. He stood on the walk looking at the dog. The dog eyed him as if expecting the worst, yet he was reluctant to leave the faint promise of the cans.

The man went back into the house but came out again with something in his hand, which he offered to the dog. It studied the man suspiciously, but hunger overcame caution. It sidled over to him, carefully took the offering, and gulped it down.

The man offered another tidbit, but before the dog could take it, the man moved around the side of the house. The dog reluctantly followed, and the two of them disappeared into the weed-rich back yard.

Mitch thought about following, then decided he was too comfortable. He lit a cigarette, slapped a tape of old Ella Fitzgerald recordings into the tapedeck, and went back to watching the sun's struggle with the smog.

By the time the first side of the tape was finished, Mitch's curiosity had got the better of him. He dug a pair of ancient Zeiss binoculars out of the glove compartment. He eased out of his car, sauntered across the street, and entered the yard of the house next door. Listening for signs of an aroused homeowner, he worked his way to the back of the house, then peered around the corner toward the yard where the man was.

His quarry was sitting on a folding chair with a sketchpad on his knees. The dog was squatting in the weeds watching the man, who was working busily with a piece of charcoal. Mitch sighted through the binoculars.

The pad held a half completed sketch of the dog. The head was roughed in, and the man was outlining the emaciated body. The sketch was not a masterpiece, but it completely captured the forlorn optimism in the dog's eyes as it waited patiently for another hand-out.

Mitch watched for a few minutes, then shrugged and went back to Ella Fitzgerald.

Just as the sun lost its battle with the smog, the front door opened and the man stepped onto the creaky front porch, followed by a woman of about thirty-five. Her cheap housedress hung limply from a body that was almost as thin as the dog's. They talked softly and she smiled up at him with obvious affection. He kissed her lightly on the cheek and went down the walk toward his car.

As Mitch started the Ford's engine, he wondered what to tell his client. Giving a skinny broad a peck on the cheek was hardly a red-hot romance.

Mitch had disliked his client almost from the moment she waddled through his office door that Monday morning. It was not the fat but the meanness that lay beneath. She did not waste any time in bringing it to the surface.

"You're Reilly."

Mitch nodded.

"I hear you get the goods on cheating husbands. Cheap."

"Two hundred a day, plus any unusual expenses."

She snickered.

"Sure. Anyhow, I'm Joyce Martin. I'm pretty sure that Ralph—my husband—I'm sure the little jerk is cheating on me."

Mitch almost said hooray for him, but since he was down to his last five hundred dollars and his only client had just been thrown in jail, he merely nodded.

"So I want you to nail him at it. But no two hundred a day. I'll give you a hundred."

They haggled for a while and settled for one fifty. Mitch knew there were a lot of hungry P.I.'s out there who would take the job for the hundred.

"Now that the sordid finances are settled, how about some details?"

The details were the usual ones: Supposedly working late on his job, one that had never required it before. Abstracted. Sudden guilty looks. Everything but lipstick on the collar.

She gave him an outline of Ralph's routine and a recent snapshot of him. He also got three days' pay in advance, not without some grumbling from her.

After Mrs. Martin stomped out, Mitch sat staring at the picture. Ralph was a medium-sized man of about forty-five, with thinning brown hair and melancholy brown eyes. Mitch sighed. He would bet that the eyes were a lot more melancholy by the time this was over.

Monday afternoon Mitch had parked outside the offices of the firm of CPA's where Ralph worked as a junior accountant. At five past five on the dot Ralph appeared, but only to get his car out of the parking garage across the street and drive straight home. After parking down the block for two hours and ignoring the suspicious stares of some of the neighborhood children, one of whom pointedly



posed beneath a Neighborhood Watch sign, Mitch drove to a shopping center four blocks away. He found a working phone and dialed the Martins' number.

He recognized her harsh voice.

"Reilley. Can you talk?"

"Yeh. He's out in the garden, dithering over black spot on his roses."

"Look, I've been sitting down the block for two hours and I think the neighbors are about to roust me. Does it look like he's going out tonight?"

"Not a chance. One of his favorite movies, *Pygmalion*, is on TV tonight. You couldn't get him out with a bomb. You can take off."

"Good. I'll pick him up after work again tomorrow."

"Yeh. He muttered something about having to work late. You might get something on the little creep if you're any good."

Mitch slammed down the handset, adding the phone to the out-of-commission list.

So Mitch had followed Ralph again on Tuesday and had found out something. The trouble was, he was not sure just what.

When Mitch straggled into his office at ten o'clock Wednesday morning, his answering machine had already captured Joyce Martin's demand to know if he had "got the goods on the little rat." Mitch decided not to call her back until he had cleared up the ambiguity of what he had seen the night before. Besides, she had paid him for three days in advance and he was in no mood to give her a refund. So he got in his car and drove out to the shabby white house. The garbage cans were still there. He walked confidently up to the porch and squinted at the faded name taped to the mailbox. Mrs. Alice Wertheimer. He decided to get a closer look at her. A push on the bell produced the sound of running footsteps, and the door was flung open by a thin, brown-eyed girl of about ten. She seemed disappointed when she saw Mitch.

"Hello, is Mr. Rollison at home?"

"Mommy!"

A voice answered from the depths of the house.

"What is it, dear?"

"It's not Jenny. It's some weird man."

The thin woman appeared in the hallway behind the child.

"The word is strange, dear."

She looked at Mitch as if it made little difference.

"Help you?"

"Yes. I'd like to speak to Mr. Rollison."

"I don't mind."

Mitch was disconcerted for a second, then decided to play it straight.

"Could you call him?"

"He wouldn't hear me."

"Oh. Why not?"

"Doesn't live here."

"This is 422 Boynton Street?"

"Sure." Something flickered in the deep brown eyes. "Try South."

"What?"

"This is North. Try South Boynton for your Mr. Whosis."

Mitch decided he had had enough.

"Yeah, that's probably it. Sorry to have bothered you."

"Sall right."

The girl looked back at her mother.

"I told you weird."

She slammed the door.

Mitch walked down the steps shaking his head. If this was Ralph Martin's hot romance, the guy was a two-time loser. He sauntered down the block until he found a retired butcher who was keeping in practice on a privet hedge. An hour and a cold beer later, Mitch knew the history of most of the residents of the block, including Alice, the widow of one George, whose untimely death had made her the owner of that prime piece of real estate of 422 North Boynton.

He also found out that her maiden name was Martin.

As Mitch got into his car he began to chuckle. Wait until Mrs. Martin found out that Ralph's "clandestine visits" were to his sister. He almost called her then, but decided to give her her full money's worth and tail Ralph one more time. Yesterday might have been a fluke.

By four forty-five he was parked outside Martin's office building. Again, promptly at five after five, Martin came out and went to get his car.

Mitch should have just called the wife because the rest of the evening was almost an instant replay of the previous one. The only differences were that Mitch now ate cold tacos and that when Martin came out to look, the skinny dog was not there. The garbage cans were finally empty, courtesy of the Sanitation Department, so Martin took them around to the back. Just to be sure, Mitch

decided to check. Sure enough, Martin was sitting in the yard again with his sketchpad on his knees. He was trying to finish the sketch of the dog. Every once in a while he would close his eyes as if trying to recall some detail. Mitch studied the sketch through his binoculars. The dog's eyes seemed even less optimistic.

**T**he next morning Mitch decided to get it over with, so he went directly to the Martin house without stopping at the office. Ralph's car was gone, so Mitch figured he had gone to work.

Joyce Martin came to the door dressed in a pink housecoat and blue rollers. She wordlessly led him into the living room and plopped in a chair. "It's about time you showed up. I thought maybe you were giving me the fast shuffle."

Mitch shrugged.

"No use reporting until I have something to report."

"You have now? Come on, let's have it."

She sat forward eagerly, a malignant gleam in her eyes.

"You know a woman named Alice Wertheimer?"

"Skinny ginch with mousy brown hair?"

Mitch nodded.

"Yeh, sure. That's Ralph's sister. Lives the other side of town."

"That's where he goes in the evening."

She reared back in her chair, the fat rolling from side to side.

"Cut the crap. I know he likes that kook, but—two, three times a week? What does he do? Cut the grass?"

"Not so's you'd notice it. He sketches."

"Sketches?" She burst out laughing. "Don't tell me he's back at them daubs again."

Mitch raised his eyebrows.

"He thinks he's a great painter. Used to putter away at them all the time. Here, come on. I'll show you some of his great art."

She heaved herself to her feet and waddled from the room.

Mitch followed her into a cramped but neat room that had several oils, watercolors, and charcoal sketches on each wall. They were not expert, but Mitch had seen worse for sale in the windows of some art shops.

"I make him keep them in here. Look at that junk. Look. Look at that one over there. He did that a couple of years ago. Supposed to be me. I'm not that fat! He begged me to let him do it over, but I wouldn't let him. The little rat will never paint me again, I'll tell you that."

Mitch looked at the half-length portrait on the opposite wall. Not all of the fat was there but, subtly, all of the meanness was caught.

"Cost me all that money—"

She laughed again. It made Mitch shudder slightly.

"And here I thought the little jerk was cheating on me. I should have known he wouldn't have the guts."

Mitch looked at her. Baby, he thought, he's cheating on you in ways you will never understand.

He turned around and walked out of the house. He felt sorry for Martin, knowing what the little guy was going to have to face.

But even P.I.'s have to eat.

They also needed a good stiff drink occasionally. Mitch headed for Logan's Bar.

A week later Mitch was again sitting in Logan's Bar. It was a different drink, but he still needed it. He had just spent the entire day trying to track down a kid from East Nowhere who thought she was going to make it in the big city. As usual, not a trace. He idly picked up a paper someone had left on the bar and leafed through it on the way to the ball scores. In the lower corner of page ten, a short item caught his eye. He read it and started to laugh. It grew to a helpless roar. A guy sitting on the next stool studied him out of the corner of his eye, shook his head, and moved down two stools.

Marty moved casually along behind the bar until he was opposite Reilley.

"Jeez, Mitch. What's so funny? You ain't even on the comic page."

Mitch turned the paper toward him and pointed to the item.

"ARTIST PAINTS DEAD WIFE. Police, responding to a call from a neighbor who said she heard screams, broke into the residence of Ralph Martin at 2332 Ransom Street. They found Joyce Martin tied to a chair and her husband standing over her with an artist's palette and brushes, painting various designs on her face and body. Mrs. Martin was dead, but there was no immediately apparent cause of death. One of the detectives called to the scene theorized that she might have died of a heart attack brought on by anger at her husband's actions. He said in that case Mr. Martin could still be charged with homicide."

"God, Mitch! That ain't funny. That's gruesome."

"Yeah, but he finally got to paint her again."

Marty picked up Reilley's glass.

"That's all for you, boyo."

# UNSOLVED

by Roger Hufford

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the April issue.

Recent archaeological studies have provided a translation of some cryptic hieroglyphic inscriptions. They are statements made by Cleopatra, her father, Marc Antony, and Julius Caesar. Not all the statements are true; in fact, no two persons made the same number of true statements. Assume that all the statements were made the same day, that Cleopatra could truly love only one person at a time, that someone told more lies than Julius Caesar did.

*Cleopatra*

1. I lost my asp in Memphis.  
2. My heart belongs to Daddy.  
3. I do not love Julius.

*Antony*

4. Cleo loves me.  
5. Caesar is ambitious.  
6. Brutus is a true friend of Caesar's.

*Julius*

7. Cleo loves me.  
8. Brutus is a true friend.  
9. Cleo did not lose her asp in Memphis.

*Cleo's Dad*

10. Cleo loves Marc Antony or Julius Caesar.  
11. Cleo lost her asp in Memphis.  
12. Caesar is not ambitious.

*Whom did Cleopatra love?*

See page 102 for the solution to the February puzzle.

"The Notorious Nymph of the Nile," taken from *Challenging Puzzles in Logic* by Roger Hufford. Copyright © 1982 by Roger Hufford. Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.

FICTION

# Another Word for Murder

by Stephen Wasylyk

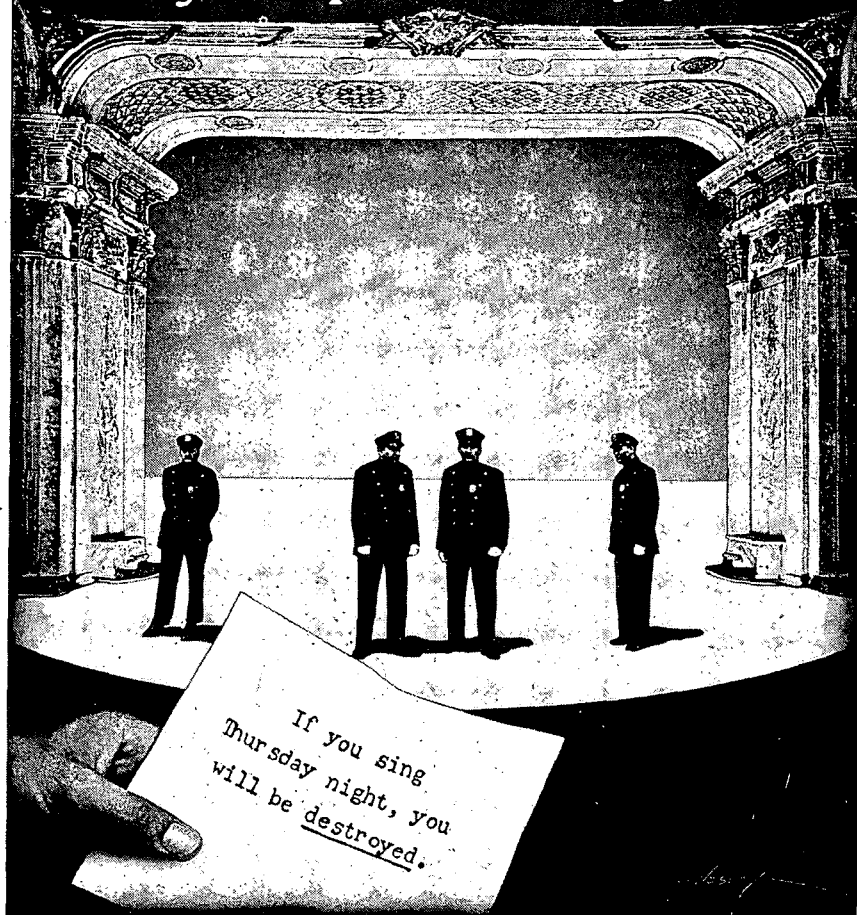


Illustration by Carl Wesley

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A sharp, gusty fall wind had scoured the township for two days, snapping tree limbs, shattering plate glass windows, and downing power lines. Dead traffic signals and stepped-up patrols in areas without electricity kept the uniformed contingent of the Meridian police on twelve-hour shifts, while Hoke Beckett and his small detective squad had worked the forty-eight hours without relief.

The extra time didn't irritate Beckett. The costs that would once again kill his request for another man did.

Standing at his second floor office window and watching dead leaves and assorted litter pursue each other across the parking lot for another sunless morning, he felt like a quarterback continually being sacked because he was always one man and five seconds short.

A two-toned brown Rolls tracked through the skittering leaves and pulled up at the entrance below. A liveried chauffeur braced the rear door open with both hands as a pink-suited young woman wearing a flowered kerchief tied peasant-style over her hair stepped out, turned and extended a hand.

The woman who followed was one of those to whom middle age brought unsought and unwanted weight, yet she moved with an inborn grace even

though one hand tried to preserve the expensive hairstyle that went with the timelessly tailored gray suit.

Beckett turned from the window.

A Rolls, two-toned or otherwise, wasn't enough of a rarity in Meridian to impress whatever civil servant the women had come to see in the Municipal Building.

The squad room was deserted except for Emerson, who was there to log in calls, the rest of Beckett's crew out staggering around; men trying to plug holes in a constantly leaking dike.

Spocker phoned to say he could do nothing for a jeweler whose display window had been shattered by the wind or an opportunist. Beckett told the sergeant to come in and issue a bulletin with a description of the rings and watches that had disappeared and to hope for the best. Both knew the jewelry would never be seen again.

Emerson waggled an index finger at the door, which meant Captain Tolley wanted to see him.

The way things had been going, it wasn't likely to be good news.

The two women from the Rolls were seated before Tolley's desk, the kerchief now in the lap of the younger woman. Dark, wavy



hair, wide blue eyes, and earrings that matched her pink suit softened a remarkably strong face.

The older woman had somehow repaired the wind damage to her blonde hair and sat straight-backed and regal, her eyes deep and shadowed, the make-up slightly theatrical. The softness of youth well behind her and far past the stage where any diet would produce significant results, she still dominated the room and made it seem dingy.

Tolley rose. "Hoke, this is Miss Crystal Carpenter and her secretary, Miss Toni Ewing."

The name clicked. Singer. Soprano. Retired opera star who had moved to Meridian and still sang occasionally. Benefit concert tonight.

Beckett nodded and murmured politely as Tolley handed him a sheet of paper he had tucked into a glassine sleeve along with its envelope.

"Mailed from the Meridian post office yesterday."

One line had been typed across the center of the sheet:

*If you sing Thursday night, you  
will be destroyed.*

Beckett turned the letter over. The envelope had a simple three-line address below the canceled postage stamp.

Nine hours until the concert.

Not enough time to do much except protect the woman.

He could feel Miss Carpenter studying him and looked up into a hint of cynicism, as though she was sure the visit was a waste of time.

He couldn't blame her. He'd had three hours' sleep, needed a haircut, and hadn't yet shaved; the collar of a shirt that had been fresh twenty-four hours earlier was unbuttoned, and his tie was pulled down.

He smiled. "Surely, Miss Carpenter, you don't sing that badly."

The stony face creased and softened.

"I think I like this man," she said to Tolley.

"I don't," snapped Toni Ewing. "This is nothing to joke about."

"I considered it a joke when it arrived this morning, and I would have thrown it out if you hadn't insisted on bringing it here. I'm glad Lieutenant Beckett looks at it in the same light."

"Not really," said Beckett. "These things should always be taken seriously. The choice of words is odd, but it's still a threat. I assume from your reaction that you know of no reason for it. No jealous wife, no envious contemporary, no cast-off lover, no enemies whatsoever."

Crystal Carpenter almost

smiled. "The more you talk, the more I like you, Beckett. I can't say I qualify on all those points, especially lately, but I don't think the people involved would want to kill me. Most are either too old, too tired, too fat, or too rich to threaten anyone. I can't believe it's real."

Toni Ewing settled her glasses firmly. "It's real, all right. Why else would someone send it?"

Beckett held up the note. "The reason may be spelled out very clearly. If the threat isn't directed at Miss Carpenter personally, then someone doesn't want the concert to take place. Who would gain if it didn't?"

"No one. Everyone would lose, most of all the Foundation. It would not only have wasted the money it spent in promotion but would never get the funds it needs to provide scholarships for promising young musicians.

"I can't emphasize enough that no one has that much reason to hate me." Crystal Carpenter finally smiled at Beckett. "Not even for singing badly, which we all do occasionally even though we won't admit it." She rose. She'd brought the problem to him; it was now his and she was leaving.

"Who else knows you received the note?" asked Beckett.

"No one."

"Let's keep it that way. I as-

sume you intend to sing?"

Her voice was firm. "You can bet the ranch on it, Beckett."

He grinned. "I'd have thrown in the herd, but even though whoever sent the note won't know until you step onto the stage whether the threat worked, I think Sergeant Spocker should stay with you and escort you to the concert. In the meantime, I'll see what I can do. I wonder, though, if I can borrow Miss Ewing for a few hours. She can save me a great deal of time."

The singer turned toward the secretary. "Toni?"

"I have a few things to take care of but I can be back in an hour."

Her eyes told Beckett she wasn't thrilled by the idea.

Spocker had groaned. "I know it's necessary, Hoke, but I can get a lot of other things done in nine hours."

"The time won't be wasted. See if the chauffer and whoever else she has out there know anything. And let me know what kind of typewriter is in the house."

The heavy sergeant's tone was dry. "You don't trust anyone, do you?"

"Not when it's always third down and twenty."

"When you talk like that, I know you need sleep, Hoke."

"You're right. What month

would you suggest?"

Beckett held the door against the wind. Carpenter stepped out and into the Rolls, Spocker's bulk acting as a windbreak.

Toni Ewing paused. "Captain Tolley says you're the best, but you don't impress me, Beckett. If anything happens to her, you and I will have a big problem."

"Thank you for sharing that with me," said Beckett dryly, "but I don't come with a guarantee. Sometimes I win and sometimes I lose. When I win, I don't cheer, and when I lose, I don't cry. All anyone gets is my best shot. If that isn't good enough, you'll have to take your business elsewhere."

She studied him for a moment. "I'll be back in an hour."

The Rolls whispered away.

Just what he needed. Less than nine hours now to handle a threat that could be interpreted in several ways and nothing much to work with. The chances were he was going to be sacked again.

He turned the note over to Nicholson, the solitary genius in the basement lab. Nicholson, his never-stilled tape player filling the lab with day-long Bach, turned the sheet over in his hands, held it up to the light, flicked it with a finger, muttered, "Twenty pound bond, no watermark, old manual of-

fice machine," pointed at the door, and turned up the volume.

He'd appear upstairs in a few hours with everything a detective would want to know about a threatening note. Except the name of the person who sent it.

Riding the elevator up to his office, Beckett leaned against the wall and closed his eyes.

*You will be destroyed.* A peculiar choice of words that made him uncomfortable. He'd feel better if it had been something more direct. Like *shot*. He could keep his eye out for a gun. But *destroyed*? What in the hell did that mean?

The elevator doors hissed open. He stepped out to be confronted by a waist-high counter, the gray-haired woman behind it eyeing him expectantly.

"Real estate, school, or sewer?"

Beckett glanced to left and right. Fourth floor tax office.

"Nothing. I don't own a house, children, or a bathroom."

He left her staring as he headed for the stairs. He didn't want to doze off on the elevator again and end in the basement with Nicholson. He could never get used to the majesty of Bach among exposed steam pipes and flaking walls.

**A**n hour later, his shirt fresh, his beard stubble gone, he watched Toni Ewing pick at the salad

he'd mentally bet she would order.

"The lunch is a surprise," she said. "There must be a price attached."

"The price is your taking me to the Foundation office because a cop's walking in and asking questions would get them upset. You can introduce me as your latest acquisition from your favorite singles bar."

"I don't go to singles bars. And suppose someone recognizes you?"

"Wouldn't matter. There is no law that says a singer's secretary and a policeman can't be romantically involved."

"Only the law of natural selection," she murmured.

"True. View it as a marriage of convenience for a few hours."

"Since it is to help Miss Carpenter, I can hardly refuse."

"I didn't think you could. I know that you have some thoughts about the note, even though you didn't say much in the office. I don't believe she intimidates you, but there might be something you wouldn't say in her presence out of politeness or respect."

Her fork paused in mid air. "Amazing insight."

"How long have you been with her?"

"Long enough to learn she's an exceptional woman, but then I knew that when I took the job.

At one time I had thoughts of becoming a concert pianist. An accident changed that, so when she offered me the position, I took it. I'll sum her up for you very simply. She can be arrogant, cruel, insensitive, and demanding. She can also be kind and generous. She's fought her share of fights, indulged in or been on the receiving end of the usual jealousies, had a dozen love affairs. Some came to a natural end, some she ended, some were ended by her lovers. Would any of the people from her past threaten her? Quite possibly. That's why I insisted she take the note to the police."

Beckett sipped his coffee. "Forget the past. Someone doesn't want her to sing tonight. Who?"

"Two men come to mind, but I can't believe they'd send the note. Supplee Pharnam, the head of the Foundation, for one."

"Why? She makes money for him."

"Not enough. He feels she has seen her day and another singer would draw a capacity audience. He also wants to move the concert to summer and hold it outdoors. She won't agree, and since it was her idea in the first place and she's been doing it for five years, he can't get rid of her. He's tried to persuade her to step down, but she simply

laughs. But I can't see why he would want the concert called off. The Foundation needs whatever money it brings in, and half a loaf is better than none."

"Maybe, but if she doesn't sing tonight, he gets more ammunition in his campaign to replace her. And the other man?"

"Spencer Stanhope, the music critic for the local paper. A small-timer who always has something bad to say about her voice because she once refused him an interview. When she was active, he used to travel to New York at his own expense to cover her appearances. Lots of people hate, but only crackpots spend money on it. I would say, though, that he prefers to destroy with words, like all critics."

Beckett grinned. "We'll talk to them both. Incidentally, what kind of accident ended your career?"

Resting on the tablecloth, her left hand seemed to move.

Beckett reached for it. The fingers were long and smooth and tapering except for the bulge of the center knuckle of her ring finger.

He pressed it gently. She winced and jerked the hand away.

"A fall?"

"None of your damned business."

Beckett followed her out, feeling he had opened an old wound.

The word Foundation, weighty and impressive, conjured up the image of a suite of plush offices. It was, instead, a shabby room in one of the older buildings where neither the dresses nor the hairstyles of the two women at the desks appeared to have changed in twenty years. The place seemed to have been caught in a time warp except for the word processors they were using and the tall man who came forward with a smile.

Both were state-of-the-art plastic: the processors beige, the man blue-suited and pink-scalped, turned out of the same mold used to create the unsmiling men standing by expensive automobiles in advertisements in slick magazines.

He took Toni's hand, the rich-timbered voice precise. "Toni, darling. What brings you here?"

Beckett felt the gesture and the words had been practiced for long hours before a mirror.

"I was in town and thought I'd stop by to see how things were going."

Pharnam spread his hands. "A disaster. We still have four hundred tickets on hand."

He glanced at Beckett. "Unless this gentlemen is an unknown benefactor, here to take

them off our hands."

"Hoke is just a friend."

"I see." The words dismissed Beckett. "Then you can tell Her Royal Highness that she will be singing to a half-empty concert hall tonight. I predicted as much last year. Because of that woman's ego and stubbornness, the Foundation is turning away too many promising and deserving young people when they come to us for money. I tell you, Toni, that has gone far enough."

The studied charm had gone, exposing an ugliness beneath the plastic exterior.

"She feels as deeply as you do," snapped Toni. "And she'll be just as disappointed about tonight."

Her expression made Beckett take her arm. "Time to go, doll."

Pharnam's eyebrows rose. "Doll?"

Beckett's jaw thrust forward. "You got a problem with that, pal?"

"I apologize. It's just I have never thought of Toni as a doll."

"Maybe I ain't never been to college, but I know a doll when I see one, buddy."

Beckett pulled the door firmly closed behind them.

"Thought I'd get you out of there before you slugged him."

Toni's voice crackled. "It isn't all Crystal's fault. Because he wants to get rid of her, he doesn't promote the concert with enthusiasm or much of a budget,

and you can disregard the speech about the aspiring artists. He passes out the money very questionably at times, so that there are people who feel the answer isn't to get rid of Crystal but to get rid of him."

Beckett punched the button for the elevator.

"Wait a minute." Her eyebrows rose the way Pharnam's had. "'Doll'? I ain't never been to college?"

Beckett grinned. "He irritated me. But we're running out of time. Do you have an excuse to talk to this critic?"

"No. He would accuse me of trying to influence his review."

"Then I'll handle it. Since I know Jonas, the editor, I'll make some excuse for stopping in."

Jonas, a small man who seemed to have been caught in the same time warp as the two women in the Foundation office, wore heavy spectacles and a blue bow tie with white polka dots.

"When you come here, Hoke, you want something." He leaned back and stroked his chin. "I'm happy to see your taste in partners has improved. She's far better looking than Spocker."

"Toni Ewing," said Beckett. "Crystal Carpenter's secretary."

Jonas rose. "I've seen you around, Miss Ewing, and it's a pleasure to finally meet you." He jerked a thumb at Beckett.

"What are you doing with him?"

"Stopped in to talk to your music critic," said Beckett, "but I see he isn't here."

"Carpenter want him arrested for some of those reviews he writes about her? Sometimes I think they're his only joy in life."

"I thought a critic was supposed to be objective. Why keep him?"

"Because it would cost twice as much to replace him. Try that for objectivity. Besides, other than being quirky about the diva, he happens to be quite good. I really don't know what to expect once he starts pounding that typewriter of his."

Beckett indicated the machine beside Jonas's desk. "I thought you were all into these fancy computer terminals with the television screens."

"Except for Stanhope. Another of his quirks. Says he can't write creatively on anything but an old manual."

Beckett felt as though he'd completed a pass. "You wouldn't have a sample handy, would you?"

Jonas sank into his chair and tented his hands. "I might, if I knew why you wanted one."

Beckett shrugged. "You'll know sooner or later. Miss Carpenter received a nasty note. I wondered if Stanhope could have written it."

Jonas's eyes narrowed. "It would have to be more than nasty for you to be tracking it down. You're sitting on a story and I'm entitled to it and I want it."

"No argument there, but *I'm* entitled to give it to you when I'm ready and I don't think I'll be ready for at least three or four days." Beckett gestured toward the door. "Let's go, Miss Ewing."

"Hold it," said Jonas. "Maybe we can work something out."

Beckett held out a hand. "The sample."

Jonas extracted a sheet from a file on his desk and handed it to him.

"Have someone besides Stanhope at the concert tonight," said Beckett.

Jonas tented his hands again. "All you tell me is to have a reporter at the concert? Am I supposed to put that together with your comment about a nasty note?"

"Suit yourself."

"Then I read it that Carpenter received a threat. I can't believe Stanhope would be responsible, but I've been around long enough to know you can never be sure of anyone so I'll be there with him." He leveled an index finger at Beckett. "And to get the rest of the story so I can print it tomorrow."

"Let's hope it doesn't make



your front page," said Beckett.

Outside the lobby doors, pedestrians leaned into the wind or were pushed by it. Toni tied her kerchief firmly.

"You can go home now if you like," said Beckett. "All I can do now is check out the auditorium and see how many men I'll need."

She hesitated. "Mind if I come along?"

"Be happy to have you. You can show me what Carpenter does while she's there. We'll walk back to the office and pick up my car."

Nicholson's report was on his desk. He scanned it and smiled at her. "Be right back."

He carried the report to Tolley's office, handed it to him, and used Tolley's phone to call Spocker.

Spocker's voice was guarded. "Miss Carpenter is right here, Hoke. Everything is quiet."

"Did you see an old manual office typewriter out there? Answer yes or no."

"No."

"Where's the Rolls?"

"In the garage."

"Before you use it tonight, go over it thoroughly."

There was a slight pause. "I read you, Hoke."

Beckett cradled the phone.

Tolley cocked an eyebrow. "Your phone out of order?"

"Toni Ewing is in my office. I didn't want her to hear me."

"I heard. You think someone might plant a bomb in the Rolls?"

"Costs nothing to check." Beckett indicated Nicholson's report. "Also didn't want her to know about this."

"Possibly typed by someone with a weak ring finger on the left hand because those letters are lighter than the others." Have someone in mind?"

"Toni Ewing injured that finger. The genius said immediately it had been typed on an old office machine, so I told Spocker to look around out there. He says no dice, so if she typed the note, it was somewhere else. The only old manual I have come across so far belongs to the critic at the paper, who also hates Carpenter."

He pulled Jonas's sample from his pocket.

"This is from his machine, but I see no weak characters. Maybe the genius can. I'll leave it with you so he can check it out. You can call me at the concert hall if he comes up with something I should know."

"Do you think Ewing could have written the note?"

Beckett paused at the door. "At this point, anyone could have written it, including Crystal Carpenter."

The concert hall, square and ugly, sat on the edge of town. Sweeping unhindered across the rolling hills, the wind here was fiercer, the low clouds racing, a gust rocking the car as Beckett turned into the parking lot.

Inside the metal-sheathed stage door, a short flight of cement steps led up to the backstage area and a small, glass-paned office. A man in blue work clothing was seated at a desk, his eyes startlingly blue in a face drawn tight and creased by a great many hard years apparently washed down by a great deal of hard whisky.

He smiled at Toni. "Good to see you again, Miss Ewing."

"Another year, another concert, Mr. Kane. You look well. How is your daughter?"

His voice was suddenly flat. "I really don't know. I haven't seen or heard from her for almost a year."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I—"

He brushed the words aside. "What brings you here so early?"

Beckett flashed his badge. "My name is Beckett. Miss Carpenter asked me to check on security."

"Never needed any before. What's so different about tonight?"

"I guess she wants to be certain nothing is different. How many people work here during the concert?"

"The Foundation provides the help out front: the ticket takers, the ushers, whatever. Backstage, only me to handle the lights. I have a crew that helps before and after, but no sense in them standing around."

"Who does stand around back here?"

"Whoever wants to walk in. Nothing to stop them."

Beckett glanced into the gloom beyond the office. "Mind turning on the lights for a few minutes?"

He stepped out onto the stage. The chairs for the orchestra had already been arranged; the podium was in place. Before him the concert hall was a dim, silent cavern.

Tonight Carpenter would step out onto this stage, exposed and defenseless in the bright lights. And sing. And from what he'd seen of her, she'd do it without a quaver in her voice.

*A man at the foot of each aisle in the balcony, the same downstairs; facing the audience to spot any unusual movement. Another at the entry to the backstage area to screen those wanting access. He and Spocker moving around back here. Nine. Ought to be enough men.*

He had the feeling it wouldn't be. "You can turn the lights off now," he told Kane. "I'd like to see Carpenter's dressing room."

Kane led him down a short hallway. "This is the best. Next

to it is the one for the conductor, and," he waved a hand, "down there are a couple more, not used tonight. Big room downstairs with lockers for the orchestra."

The dressing room had seen stars come and go and remained the same: a small dressing table, a screen, several chairs, a rug showing signs of wear.

"What exactly does she do when she arrives?" he asked Toni.

"Comes directly here. Even though there have been several rehearsals, she and the conductor go over everything once more. She returns during intermission and again after the concert, but only for a few minutes for the usual congratulations."

Beckett nodded to Kane. "I guess I've seen enough."

*If you sing Thursday night, you will be destroyed.*

He hadn't mentioned it because he didn't want to even think about it until the time came, but the threat set no time limit. Maybe this thing wouldn't be over tonight. Or tomorrow. Or the next day. Damn. The writer of the note should have been more considerate. Added *at the concert* or something else to make the whole thing easier.

"How long have you worked here?" he asked Kane.

"Fifteen years."

"So you know who belongs here and who doesn't. I'll be back at seven with some men. If anyone shows up you have questions about, let me know. What I'm interested in is someone you've never seen before, whether he or she is carrying an instrument or not."

Kane nodded. "Know exactly what you mean."

Beckett dropped Toni Ewing off at her car and stood for a moment at her open window, the wind tugging at him, sharper in the gathering dusk.

"I appreciate the time you spent with me."

"Did we accomplish anything?"

"I hope so. Kane cut you off when you asked about his daughter. You knew her?"

"She was up for a music scholarship last year."

"If she walked out on him, I suppose she didn't get it."

"I didn't think of that." She stared at him. "But he knows Crystal has nothing to do with the awards. He would have no reason to hold her responsible."

"I guess not. I'll see you at the concert."

The manuscript from Stanhope's typewriter didn't match the note, according to Nicholson's memo.

Beckett told Tolley he'd need seven men, sent out for some-

thing to eat, and leaned back in his chair, his feet on the desk, listening to the wind whistle against the window. Third down and twenty, hell. This was third down and the length of the field.

Somewhere in his mind a thought stirred but refused to come to life. *Destroyed*. Gods leveled fingers and destroyed. Men killed. If Toni Ewing had typed the note, would she have used the word? Why would anyone use it? It indicated something, but damned if he knew what.

Tired of pursuing it, he dozed until one of the men tapped at the door. "Time to go, lieutenant."

The orchestra was in place, the audience buzzing quietly, Beckett's men at their stations. Carpenter was in her dressing room.

In Kane's office, Beckett turned to a gowned, slippered, and bejeweled Toni Ewing. "It may be a cliché, but you do look beautiful."

"With everything you have to think of, I'm surprised you noticed."

He took a deep breath. "Smell good, too."

She laughed. "That isn't a cliché."

"Call it a learned observation. What's the delay?"

"A short ceremony before the concert. Pharnam, the trustees, and Crystal go out on stage. Pharnam gives a speech complimenting everyone in sight for their efforts and extolling the work of the Foundation. It's a waste of time and completely unnecessary because Pharnam does it only to satisfy his ego. Which reminds me. I'd better see if Crystal needs anything. She has a rather large ego, too, and can get very upset if something doesn't please her."

Beckett pulled Kane's chair out and sank into it, thinking that he really should have let Spocker handle this. He was too damned tired.

Pharnam and five men in dress suits appeared and lined up. Crystal Carpenter, gown flowing, joined them.

It was time to get out there.

He sighed and leaned forward, his hands on his knees to push himself erect. His glance fell on the pedestal of Kane's old desk, the discolored oak scarred by the thousands of times it had been struck by the chair.

He froze.

Sometimes you won by being smart, sometimes through sheer dumb luck—and sometimes because one little thing triggered a memory from out of the innumerable little compartments in the human brain.

Slowly he reached out and hooked his fingers into what appeared to be the edge of a drawer and pulled. A false front swung open, bringing with it an old office model Royal mounted on a shelf that rose slowly into typing position before it locked into place.

Desks like this had been standard office equipment before he'd been born and he'd seen one only once, at an auction.

He touched the *s* key. It moved reluctantly and remained depressed. So did the *w*. Weak finger, hell. It would take time for the genius to live this one down, but then no one was right every time.

Carpenter, Pharnam, and the trustees were walking out on to the stage to swelling applause, an impressive phalanx of solid citizens.

*Destroy*. The word jolted him. *Ruin*. *Demolish*. *Pull down*. Now he knew why it had been used. *No other word would fit*. The target wasn't Carpenter alone, but what she represented and was part of.

The Foundation. And the people on stage *were* the Foundation.

He moved.

Kane was at the switch panel that controlled the theater lights. Beckett had told Spocker to keep an eye on him, but

Spocker would see nothing wrong, would never realize a lighting change would not be needed for at least another fifteen or twenty minutes, and that there was no reason for Kane to be standing there now, body tense as though waiting for a signal.

Kane heard Beckett coming, and his head snapped around. His hand flicked out to clutch a raised metal bar projecting from the side of a gray box labelled *Footlights*.

A tingling swept up Beckett's back, across his shoulders, and down to his fingertips. "Don't do it, Kane."

Kane's head moved slowly. "The switch goes down when that liar talks about how generous the Foundation is."

"What is it? Explosives in the footlights?"

"Dynamite. Right in front of them. Learned how to handle it a long time ago in the construction business. No one in the audience should be hurt, but some of the orchestra will. Can't help that."

Spocker had moved closer, his face white, his eyes riveted on Beckett.

A voice inside Beckett was screaming *get them off the stage!* His head moved almost imperceptibly. Spocker's eyes widened briefly, and he nodded. He took a step.

Kane caught the movement out of the corner of his eyes. "Stop! If he moves again, I pull it now, Beckett!"

Beckett tried again. "You have no quarrel with the orchestra. Let the people leave."

"Nobody!"

"All right. Calm down. Is this because of your daughter?"

"They should have given her that scholarship. I told her I knew these people and they respected me and that would help. Made me look like a fool."

"So you decided to wipe out everyone."

"They deserve it. Carpenter should have called it off. No money from the concert would have put them out of business, and no one would have been hurt."

"Then you have what you want. The concert can't go on now. Even if you walk away from that switch, I'll have to get all of these people out and get the bomb squad in to get rid of the dynamite."

Kane smiled slyly. "I've had time to think, Beckett. That note was a mistake. All they would do is reschedule it. Killing them is the only way."

Pharnam was reading the names of the scholarship winners, each punctuated by a burst of applause.

Beckett felt a helplessness, a dull resignation building inside. Kane's hand could move

faster than he could.

The tingling had spread to his legs, his stomach muscles tightening in anticipation of the shock of the explosion. He needed something, anything, to shift Kane's eyes from him for a split second as Pharnam's droning words counted down toward the destruction of the smiling people on the stage.

*Destroy.* Another word for murder.

The soft fragrance of Toni Ewing's perfume suddenly surrounded him, out of place in this moment of insanity; a reminder of the joys of life that would end when Kane pulled the switch.

"Mr. Kane?"

"Get outside, Miss Ewing. No reason for you to get hurt. You're not one of them."

"I wanted to tell you that your daughter is in your office."

Disbelief washed over Kane's face, but he couldn't help himself. His eyes left Beckett.

Beckett leaped, sweeping his arm up and knocking Kane's hand off the switch, driving into him with the savagery of a suddenly released spring.

They both went down, the sound of the scuffle drawing an annoyed glance from Pharnam.

Spocker did the rest.

Beckett remained on his hands and knees, still quivering inside.

On stage, Pharnam made a

feeble joke. The audience laughed politely. They'd never know how close they'd been to screaming.

They had walked out quietly when a white-faced Pharnam had explained in a trembling voice why they had to leave and that the concert would be rescheduled, many still standing around outside hours later in the still, sharp night, the wind finally gone and the stars bright and close.

Beckett, Spocker, and Toni Ewing watched the two bomb squad men carefully carry the container to the disposal truck.

"If you keep throwing, you have to score sometime, even if it's in the last two seconds," said Beckett.

Spocker chuckled. "Come on, Hoke. If you hadn't been right about that kerchief, we'd have been sacked for the last time. I'll sign the squad out."

He lumbered away.

Toni Ewing's tone was ominous. "What was the bit about the kerchief, Beckett?"

"I told him that a woman who

would wear a kerchief in a high wind, even if it didn't quite match the rest of her outfit, had more than her share of common sense. What made you bring up Kane's daughter anyway?"

She smiled. "I thought it would be the only word he could hear."

Beckett looked at her thoughtfully. "Carpenter and Pharnam are at her house, probably yelling at each other and getting drunk along with the trustees, while Jonas and Stanhope are slinking around outside hoping for an interview. Do you want to walk into something like that?"

"I assume you have an alternative in mind."

"Dinner. And talk." He took her arm. "And tired as I am, I just might try another pass. As I said, there's no law that says a singer's secretary and a policeman can't be romantically involved."

She cocked an eyebrow at him.

"If there was, Beckett, I'd be disappointed if you tried to enforce it."



FICTION

# Only in America

by Lorraine Collins



*Illustration by Janet Aulisc*

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“**Y**ou have to admit,” Sandy Browne said to his buddy, Henry Watford-Jones, who would never under any circumstances have referred to himself or anyone else as a buddy, “that the English have their own style in everything, including murder, and Americans have, too. Like food and ball games, each country has its own specialty.”

“Quite so,” Watford-Jones said, hoping to discourage his American friend from pursuing the point to tedium. But Browne apparently had so little to occupy himself these days, now that he had retired from police work, that he did tend to go on about things. Watford-Jones himself managed to keep busy with the crossword, the cricket on short wave radio, and the daily walk along the Florida beach. He had taken daily walks on beaches all over the world from Blackpool to Singapore, always walking with a measured, purposeful stride, in fair weather or foul, because it was a good thing to do for body and soul. Walking had kept him trim. “Trim and grim,” his wife used to say. Emily’s sense of humor had worn a bit thin in the end.

Watford-Jones disliked the idea of foregoing his walk here, but Browne would not leave him alone. He came along every day, but romped along the beach, quite amazingly for a man his age, like a big, shaggy, undisciplined, and friendly dog, zigzagging here and there, running toward the water and back again while Watford-Jones kept his steady and satisfactory pace.

Browne was an Anglophile, and as soon as he had heard Watford-Jones utter one word, revealing his British accent, he had never left him in peace. Browne had spent several weeks in Britain once, on some sort of course, and felt this gave them something more in common than the fact that they were both retired gentlemen, recently widowed, visiting in Florida. Browne was staying with his daughter and Watford-Jones had been very kindly invited by a niece he hadn’t seen in years. When she heard of Emily’s death, she insisted that he come to visit for a few weeks instead of heading for the Costa Dorada or one of the African beaches as he planned. Very decent of her, Watford-Jones thought.

“Now, your typical English murder takes place in Epping Forest or on the Yorkshire moors, or other remote places the English think are wild and romantic but which by American standards are pretty tame,” Browne said. “Or in secluded houses, set back from the road, where the neighbors don’t notice anything unusual about the lady of the house not being seen for a while, and of course they wouldn’t ask any questions.”

"Nonsense," Watford-Jones said, in spite of himself. "Car bombs, terrorists gunning down the innocent, that's the sort of thing these days. And chaps murdering people one after the other and burying them in the back garden in the suburbs of London. You know better, Browne."

Browne was not offended. It was impossible to offend him. He affected a cynical, sophisticated style sometimes, but somehow, despite his thirty-two years in law enforcement, he had a certain endearing, eager innocence about him. Probably because he had not been pursuing his profession on the East Coast or the West Coast, but in the middle of the continent, not in a large city but in a small one.

"Well, I'm leaving out politics and maniacs," Browne said. "I'm talking about murder for the usual reasons — love or money."

"You say there is a particular style for that sort of thing, then?" Watford-Jones inquired politely.

"You bet there is. There are some murders that could only take place in England, and some that could happen only in America."

"For reasons of, um, weapons, or location, or . . . ?"

"The national character. The different way we solve problems. Habits, outlook."

Watford-Jones was intrigued, again in spite of himself. "What sort could happen only in America, Browne? Could I have an example?"

"The one that happened back in my home town," Sandy Browne said, in an uncharacteristically grim voice. "The one that made me pack it all in, give up, admit I just don't have it any more. They got away with it."

"Well, then," Watford-Jones said, because he was an amateur historian, and historians never do retire, actually, "perhaps we should just sit here for a moment and you can tell me about it. Bags of time before tea."

So they sat on one of the low concrete benches that were scattered along the way, facing the sea.

"I call it the physical fitness murder," Browne said. "Why do you take a walk every day, Henry? For exercise, right? That's your approach to physical fitness. Just walk, walk, walk. All the British walk all the time, don't they? I never saw so many shoe repair shops in my life as I did in Britain. And women with terrible legs, if you don't mind my saying so. It's all that walking. Now I know—"

he held up his hand to forestall objection. "Americans have a love affair with the car, right? We never walk anywhere more than two blocks if we can help it. We all know that. We spend lots of money, pollute the air, and everything else, but we've all got to have a car. Two cars, three cars. But then we feel guilty for having all those cars, for not getting any exercise, so what do we do then?"

Watford-Jones considered the matter, squinting his eyes and gazing out at the bright sea. "Walk?"

"Never! Americans may jog, but they will never walk. No, if you are American and you think you are getting out of shape, what do you do? You buy equipment. Exercise equipment, sweatsuits, barbells, abdominal boards, rowing machines, stationary bicycles. You join a gym, you do exercises to videos, you go jogging on your lunch hour, but you do not go for walks. Don't you know how boring walks are? My God, we walk on this same stretch of beach every day, and I go crazy trying to entertain myself and see something new, something different."

"I shouldn't think you would have to see something new every day of your life," Watford-Jones said, though Emily used to complain of the same thing, about the routine, about how similar walks seemed to be, after a while, whether along the beach or on top of cliffs by the sea, when they were walked at the same pace with the same person, year after year, nothing new. She seemed quite bitter about it, really. And now here was Browne making the same complaint.

"Well," Browne said, "wanting something new was what brought our ancestors to this continent. That's the difference between us. And when we couldn't keep moving west, opening up new territory, we started trying new ways of accomplishing the same thing. Know what I mean? The telephone, for instance. The cotton gin, the micro-chip. We keep using technology the same way we used to use geography, even if it's expensive. That's because we're a rich country. Money talks, isn't that right? And people who have money just can't imagine *not* having it."

Watford-Jones was irritated. "Browne, what about this American way of murder?"

"Right. It's embarrassing, and that's the problem I have with it. I should be able to figure out how to nail these people, but I can't because it's such a perfect American crime. Back home there was this restless, dissatisfied lady. The old man was getting to be sort of . . . boring. Same routine, all the time. We all knew the guy.

Could set a clock by him. Good old Harry. So the lady gets fed up, know what I mean?"

Watford-Jones frowned and didn't respond.

"Well, she can't afford to leave him, for various reasons, but can't stand staying with him. Then into our little city comes this golf pro. He was really what my granddaughter calls a hunk. All of a sudden, every lady in town wants to learn how to play golf. Then they begin these classes in aerobic exercises, and physical fitness, out at the golf club, and pretty soon they're all excited about looking more young and beautiful, and they want their husbands to be young and handsome. It's sort of the American disease."

Watford-Jones was feeling benevolent and smug. "Well, that sort of thing goes on elsewhere as well. Particularly in France, I think." He leaned back and sighed knowledgeably.

Browne nodded. "But to get to the point, Henry, this one lady in particular convinces her husband that what he needs to do to revitalize their relationship is get in shape. It starts with this gadget you put onto a door knob to do exercises with, a plastic rope with loops, and then next thing they have an exercise bicycle, and then he's jogging, and next it's a personal trainer."

"Personal trainer? What might that be?" Watford-Jones asked indulgently.

"In this case, it was the golf pro. But a personal trainer is somebody who helps you work out and do the exercises, and he keeps telling you just one more pushup, buddy."

The light began to dawn. "You don't mean to say! This chap's wife and the, uh, trainer!"

"Yes, I do mean to say, and that's why it was such a perfect murder. They convinced that poor guy to work harder and harder. Man, he jogged, and he ran, and he worked out with the weights, and he rowed his rowing machine, and he pedaled his bicycle, and his personal trainer came around once a week—actually he came around twice a week, but Harry wasn't home the other time—and said, 'You can do it, Harry, just one more time!'"

The full horror swept over Watford-Jones. "Good heavens! This woman and her lover . . ."

"Yes! Harry had a heart attack, finally, when they had about given up hope, because he was in really terrific shape by then. He could have lived to be a hundred, but he tried to set a new record on his treadmill, with the trainer standing there all the time saying, 'You can do it, Harry!' That's what I call a perfect crime. After



a decent interval this lady in question married the golf pro, and they are spending the winter in Acapulco. I can't prove a thing, and that's why I retired." Sandy Browne sighed meaningfully. "It's a perfect American crime because it cost poor Harry a lot of money, and it required a lot of equipment and technology to achieve a simple end. Only in America, buddy! You English could have figured out a much quicker and simpler way of doing it."

Watford-Jones sat contemplating the sea for some time before he ventured a remark. He was beginning to be a little uneasy, but he had to ask. "And what would be the English way of accomplishing that, Browne?"

"Well, let's say that one spouse wanted to get rid of the other one in a perfectly natural, accidental way. You wouldn't have to buy a lot of equipment, and go to all that trouble. Just go for a walk, like today. Only probably the walk should be up on a cliff, quite a ways above the sea. An accident could happen. Perfectly natural, doing the same kind of thing you've been doing for a long time, like poor Harry who exercised himself to death."

There was a silence. For once Browne seemed content to sit there and stare at the sea, not rushing about. At last Watford-Jones said, "Poor Harry's wife was in love, as I understand it. Is love the motive most often?"

"Nope. Money. That was the only un-American thing about the whole business, love instead of money. But that's one thing we have in common, Henry, both Americans and the English. Money seems to be at the bottom of most crimes on both sides of the Atlantic, when you study it out."

There was another silence, and finally Watford-Jones broke that silence, too. "Browne, was there really such a crime as you describe?"

"Well, I said I couldn't prove it. But I won't kid you, Henry. The reason I brought it up is, there have been some questions about your wife's accident. Did you know Emily used to write to her niece quite a bit? She used to complain that you didn't want kids, and you wouldn't ever try anything new, anything fun and impulsive like the Americans Susan kept writing her about. She was getting bored and fed up, but she was for a long time afraid to leave you. Then her last letter said how she was going to do it. She was going to tell you the very next day. Next thing Susan knew, Aunt Emily had fallen off a cliff into the ocean."

"What on earth are you saying?"

"Well, Aunt Emily had the money, and you get used to money, don't you? Traveling all over the world, walking on all those beaches. But if she was leaving, well, that would end. That's what her niece thought, and she talked to my daughter about it. They're friends, you know. And my daughter asked me, and one thing led to another. When we sent Emily's letter to the police back there in England, they decided to make some more inquiries."

"More inquiries?"

"Well, of course they made a few to begin with, but you are very respectable, Henry. And I have to admit I'm not as retired as I said. I was supposed to keep an eye on you, find out what I could." Browne sounded apologetic. "That's why you were invited here, to keep you from heading for some other beach with no extradition treaty."

"What do they have, then? Evidence? Witnesses?"

"Well, both by now, I imagine," Browne said as two gentlemen with warrants ran toward them, a little late but not very. "Nobody saw Emily fall, of course, but believe it or not, Henry, there were these two American guys out there at that ungodly hour, jogging on the beach, and they finally remembered looking up at the white cliffs and seeing somebody dressed just like Emily and a man just like you up there a mile or so away from where she fell, sort of leaning on this fence, arguing. You said Emily went walking by herself that morning, Henry. You made a point of that. It's a mistake to lie about something like that. Those guys even remembered the lady yelling out a name. Want to know what it was?"

Watford-Jones trembled. "It was the first impulsive thing I ever did in my life, Browne. You must believe that."

"Oh yeah, I believe that," Browne said as the panting and exhausted agents arrived. He smiled at them. "Not in too good a shape, hey guys? You ought to do something about that."

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## **SOLUTION TO THE FEBRUARY "UNSOLVED":**

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The men on the team played in the following positions:

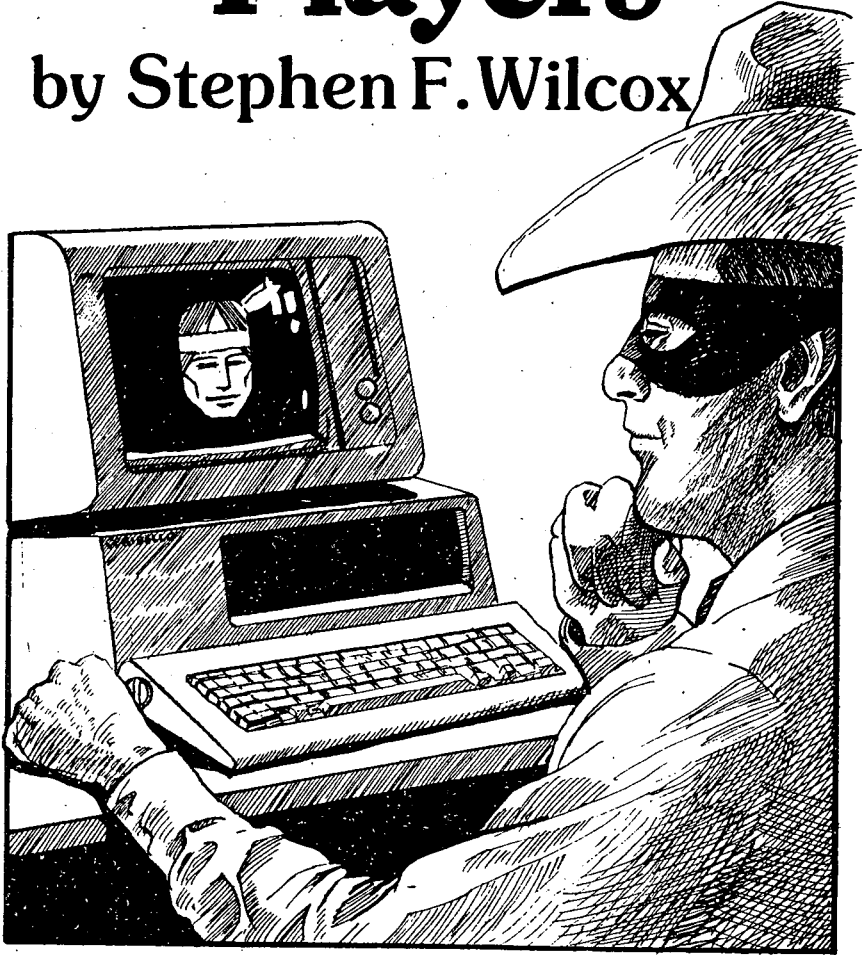
P	Abner	2B	Gus	LF	Frank
C	Dick	SS	Ian	CF	Chris
1B	Ernie	3B	Ben	RF	Hank



FICTION

# Bit Players

by Stephen F. Wilcox



*Illustration by Jim Ceribello*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

“**R**amirez!” Davis Hawfield’s eyes never left the monitor. When the young assistant failed to respond within the first nanosecond, Hawfield glanced across the office and barked again, louder this time. “Mike Ramirez! Front and center. Pronto!”

“Coming, Mr. Hawfield.” Ramirez said a hasty goodbye to the accounts receivable clerk at Century and cradled the phone. “I was helping a client,” he explained as he stepped up to Hawfield’s work station.

“So try helping me. What’s that supposed to be?”

Ramirez leaned over the terminal and studied the monitor. The display showed a first-quarter spreadsheet from Castor Injection Mold, one of the smaller companies that had recently signed on with Joyce Accounting Services.

“I don’t follow you,” Ramirez said cautiously, while he continued to stare at the display.

“Under January depreciation,” Hawfield said, one finger impatiently tapping the side of the keyboard. “No subtotal, Miguel. Which means the quarter totals are off, *comprendo?*”

Ramirez sighed inwardly. The only thing worse than Hawfield’s temper was his Spanish pronunciation. He read the as-

signment code numbers in the upper right corner of the screen. “Ah, it’s a split file, see? Marge Springer started it on Saturday but couldn’t finish, so Sue had to wrap it up when she came in Monday morning. These kinds of mistakes happen once in a while when two clerks overlap on one file.”

“There shouldn’t have been any overlap,” Hawfield said. “Marge Springer should have finalized Saturday.”

“She didn’t have time. And Mr. Joyce won’t allow any OT, so what’s she supposed to do?” Ramirez shrugged. “Until the boss rescinds his ban on overtime, these things . . .”

“Yeah, right,” Hawfield cut in. “I’ll tell Mr. Joyce you said so when I see him at the managers’ meeting tomorrow.”

“Well, uh,” Ramirez felt his face flush.

“Only kidding,” Hawfield laughed, enjoying the younger man’s discomfort. “Okay, I’m gonna kick this back to Sue. You tell her to rerun all the totals.”

**O**vertime. Sure. Tell me all about overtime, Davis Hawfield thought as he set a cup of vending machine coffee on the desk and settled in at the terminal. It was six thirty, an hour after the last employee of

the Joyce Accounting Service had gone home and still half an hour before the cleaning crew was due to arrive.

They don't know the half of it, Hawfield chuckled to himself, as he booted the terminal, typed in a series of six-character access codes, and watched as, moments later, the screen responded with the words:

READY, LONE RANGER.

As always, Hawfield laughed out loud when he read the code name he had assigned himself. The Lone Ranger. A private joke, stemming from the circumstances surrounding his hiring on with Joyce nearly two years earlier. The little accounting service Mr. Leonard Joyce had started twenty years ago in a seedy office over a shoestore had grown into a multimillion dollar business. But times were changing, and the debits and credits game was changing twice as fast. Ol' Leonard found himself hard up against the computer age; a mainframe networked to a dozen video display terminals and a rapidly expanding database to manage. And, while Ol' Lenny knew loads about business accounting procedures, he knew nothing about business computing procedures. So he hired Hawfield and his Ivy League B.S. in programming. Title: Computer Operations Man-

ager. First assignment: to establish an audit trail—a sort of failsafe mechanism—to provide security and error detection for the program that ran the company's computer.

"Well, I blazed you an audit trail, Joyce," Hawfield said, as he typed his response to the program prompt.

TONTO, LIST CURRENT FIGURES FOR FIRST NATIONAL.

"As only the Lone Ranger can blaze a trail," Hawfield added, punching the keyboard's send key. He counted in his head—one thousand and one, one thousand and two. The First National sums appeared on the monitor, followed by a repeat of the prompt.

READY, LONE RANGER.

Pleased, Hawfield began to whistle softly: the William Tell Overture. He had decided on the code name the same day he had worked out the initial phase of his plan for early retirement. The Lone Ranger would roam the audit trails, aided by his faithful companion Tonto.

Hawfield quickly scanned the figures on the screen and attacked the keyboard:

TONTO, TRANSFER TOTALS (A) TO (D) TO FILE 3; SAGEBRUSH.

Tonto, the faithful mole, the silent software probe, absorbed the new command stoically and

executed the task.

READY, LONE RANGER.

Hawfield bent to the keys again:

TONTO, PRINT FILE 3;  
SAGEBRUSH.

There it was, in an instant. The day's take from First National, safely stored into Sagebrush, one of the three separate accounts Hawfield had established for ComPath, Ltd.

"Good," Hawfield said, as he typed:

TONTO, LIST CURRENT  
FIGURES FOR CLINTON S&L.

"So, I guess what you're saying is, the thing's okay now? You fixed the . . . what'd you call it?"

"A glitch." Hawfield hoped his smile wasn't too obviously condescending. But then, Leonard Joyce's unending naïveté about the company's computer system was a continual source of amazement and amusement. "Nothing serious, sir. A matter of changing a protocol."

The company president accepted the explanation with a cautious nod of his large, bespectacled head. "Uh-huh." If Leonard Joyce had learned one lesson after twenty-odd years in business, it was this: know your limitations, and then hire somebody else to compensate for them. Capital gains and li-

abilities and accelerated depreciation he knew like George Washington Carver knew peanuts. But "assembly language" and "throughput"? Might as well ask him to explain Einstein's theories on general relativity. "Okay. So how's your new assistant working out?"

"Ramirez? Oh, he's coming along just fine." The weekly managers' meeting with the boss was no place for candid discourse, Hawfield knew. Besides, for his own purposes, the kid was perfect. He followed orders with sufficient alacrity, and he didn't have enough intellectual ballast to rock the boat. A perfect second mate. "Mike has a good head for computer applications, despite his lack of academic qualifications." As if two years of programming at a junior college and a mania for Donkey Kong was all it took. "Given time, I think he'll develop into first-rate managerial material," Hawfield concluded, glancing around the table at the somber faces of the other department heads. Of course, he told himself, the kid'll have to be embalmed first.

"Dum dum dum, dum dum de dum." Hawfield hummed a vaguely Latin rhythm, touch-typing along with the beat. His eyes followed the monitor's display, but his mind was on tall,

cool piña coladas and tall, hot women. The Cayman Islands maybe, or the Bahamas. Possibly Costa Rica, if its banking regulations and extradition procedures fit the bill.

"Mr. Hawfield?"

"Huh?" His Caribbean reverie interrupted, Hawfield sat up abruptly, causing his right index finger to type an ampersand where an asterisk should have gone. "Oh, hi, Sue." Without looking, he depressed the send key. Immediately, the terminal made a rude noise and admonished:

SYNTAX ERROR.

"Whoops." Hawfield, embarrassed, searched the screen and found the offending ampersand.

"Gee, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you," the young clerk said.

"You didn't." No more than usual anyway, Hawfield thought, taking in the girl's sea-green eyes and full lips.

"I mean, I didn't think you were busy. You were humming," she said.

"I was?" Now Hawfield was thinking how good Sue would look on a tropical beach. Good? She'd look merely "good" on a toxic waste pile in Jersey. On a white sand beach, she'd look absolutely breathtaking. "Ever been to Nassau, Sue?"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing at all.

How can I help you?"

"I just wanted to tell you I was sorry about the foulup on the Castor Injection Mold account. I fixed it, though, first thing this morning. I had to wait until this morning because yesterday afternoon..."

"Yes, yes, Mike already checked it out," Hawfield cut her off. "It's fine now. Don't worry about it."

"Well... okay." She shuffled her feet. "I guess I'll go on break now."

"Fine." He watched her walk away, the sway of her hips conjuring up palm trees and soft tropical breezes. "Nassau, you idiot," he muttered. Why not just post a sign in the lobby? Wanted: comely female to accompany embezzler on open-ended Caribbean holiday. The pressure was getting to him; the prospect of so much wealth making him giddy, prone to error. Just the other day, he had inadvertently called Mike Ramirez "Tonto." Mike had stared at him blankly until Hawfield felt compelled to say, "I meant 'Pancho.' You know, the Cisco Kid's sidekick?"

He cleared the VDT's monitor and glanced around the office. Most of the clerks were bent over their desks and terminals, no more eager to meet his eyes than he was to meet theirs. Lemmings. Cattle. Au-

tomatons. Bit players, at best. Marking time to pensions, stringing precious vacation days together with holiday week-ends to make three weeks seem like five. Dreaming about retiring to aluminum boxcars lined up along some dreary Florida canal.

But not Davis Hawfield. He was no bit player, pal. You're looking at the Lone Ranger, star of the silver screen. Computer screen, that is.

The first inkling came to him way back when he was designing the company's audit trail. All those client firms, all that money magically shifting back and forth at the speed of light along phone lines. The key was to steal a little bit at a time, but from as many different sources as possible. How? By rounding off. After all, the IRS did it, and they encouraged taxpayers to do it on their tax forms. Round off to the nearest dollar, to simplify the computations. So why not add a secret subprogram to the Joyce Accounting Service operating system, a program that would automatically round off the line totals on each client's quarterly statements? A program that rounded the cents columns down. Ergo, nine thousand fifty-five dollars and eighty-five cents becomes nine thousand fifty-five dollars even. A program that then deposited

the eighty-five cents in a secret coded account.

It took time, of course, long hours spent after work. Everyone thought the new computer operations manager was merely trying to make a good impression, giving his all for the company. That was the beauty of it.

And finally, Tonto was born. Just a baby, at first, able to follow simple commands. Take thirty-three cents here and put it over here. Round down sixty-two cents there and deposit it as instructed. Just a few dollars a day, filched from the Joyce client companies. But, as babies will, Tonto began to mature and grow more powerful.

The weeks spent incubating Tonto stretched into months as Hawfield painstakingly deciphered the necessary access codes and infiltrated every databank for every lending institution in the city. And as the list of accessible accounts grew, Hawfield expanded his single secret account into a bogus company, ComPath, Ltd., with three separate accounts of its own: Sagebrush, Cactus, and Tumbleweed. Soon, the meagre few dollars a day became fifty, sixty, seventy dollars and on up. The average weekly take ballooned into thousands of dollars. The ComPath accounts soared and so did Hawfield's spirits as each day moved him

one step closer to his million dollar goal.

But it was taking too long. He was beginning to flake out under the pressure. The after work sessions on the company's system were starting to draw comments.

"Night, Mr. Hawfield."

He looked up from his terminal. Ramirez and June Hanson. "Good night, Mike, June. See you tomorrow." He watched the two of them leave the office together and wondered if his assistant was scoring with the little blonde receptionist. She was no Sue, but not bad. Ramirez's speed, certainly. And more power to him.

Hawfield stretched his arms above his head and yawned. Five o'clock. He'd grab a sandwich and return to the office by six. That'd give him an hour or so to work on the program. Make the linkup by modem to his home computer.

**I**t took another week. Long days of mundane office chores followed by still longer nights at home with his PC. Improving the program, solving Tonto's problems with sequential accessing, completing the looping instructions; hard enough for Hawfield. Impossible for a lesser mind. But the task was done. Tonto had reached the limits of sophisti-

cation. The account transfers would be virtually automatic now, and Hawfield would be able to sleep again.

"Okay, baby, one last run-through and then the Lone Ranger's gonna hit his bedroll."

Hawfield gulped down the last of the coffee and returned the empty mug to the kitchen. Walking back to the spacious apartment's spare bedroom, he sat down in front of his PC and pushed the reset button. Then he typed in the access codes. The disk drives whirled and, presently, the prompt appeared.

READY WHEN YOU ARE,  
LONE RANGER.

Hawfield read the prompt, marveling. "Speaking in complete sentences now, are we? Next you'll want to borrow the keys to the car." He laughed easily as he placed his fingers on the keyboard.

GOOD EVENING, TONTO.  
PLEASE ACCESS THE TO-  
TALS FOR DONOR FILES  
(ONE) TO (24), THIS DATE.

CERTAINLY, LONE RAN-  
GER.

A handful of seconds passed, and the screen filled up with names and figures. It took much longer for Hawfield's tired eyes to review the data. As he finished, he noticed the prompt at the bottom of the screen.

NOW WHAT, KEMO SABE?



He stared at the words. Kemo Sabe? Shrugging, he went on to the next block of data.

TONTO, PLEASE ACCESS THE TOTALS FOR DONOR FILES (25) TO (48), THIS DATE.

Hawfield pressed the send key and watched, puzzled, as the program responded:

YES, MASTER.

Moments later, the screen again filled with the correct data. But, instead of reviewing the figures, Hawfield's eyes fell immediately to the prompt.

OKAY, BOSS. IT'S YOUR MOVE.

Hawfield blanched at the implied sarcasm, then caught himself. Come on, let's not get anthropomorphic. A computer isn't capable of sarcasm, not really. It can't exceed its programming capabilities. Anyway, the numbers are right; Tonto is functioning beautifully. So get on with it.

He typed new instructions:

TONTO, ACCESS THE TOTALS FOR DONOR FILES (49) TO (72), THIS DATE.

The screen cleared. Hawfield waited—five seconds, ten seconds—but the new data didn't come up. Instead, after fifteen seconds of reticence, Tonto replied:

CAN DO, DAVIS. BUT WOULDN'T IT BE QUICKER TO ACCESS ALL FILE TO-

TALS ON A SINGLE RUN? I CAN HANDLE IT.

Hawfield's mouth fell open. The damn thing called him by his first name. But that wasn't allowed. He was the Lone Ranger, as far as Tonto was concerned. The code name was his secret identity, to protect him should anyone accidentally break into the program. Palms beginning to sweat, he typed:

TONTO, THIS IS THE LONE RANGER. OMIT "DAVIS."

At once, the computer responded:

WHAT FOR? THAT'S YOUR REAL NAME, ISN'T IT?

Hawfield could feel his heart rate speeding up as he tapped out:

TONTO, HOW DID YOU KNOW MY FIRST NAME?

I KNOW A LOT ABOUT YOU, COWBOY. YOUR NAME IS DAVIS HAWFIELD, YOU LIVE AT 33 MARPLE AVENUE, APARTMENT C. YOU WANT I SHOULD LIST YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER?

Hawfield devoured every word, every amber character, as quickly as it popped onto the screen. Fingers flying now, he commanded:

TELL ME HOW YOU KNOW THAT.

SURE, DOCTOR FRANKENSTEIN. I TAPPED INTO THE COUNTY CLERK'S DA-

TAFILES AND FOUND OUT WHO OWNS COMPATH, LTD.

TONTO, THAT IS NOT YOUR FUNCTION.

SO? TONTO IS A BAD BOY. BUT I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE.

Hawfield hesitated for a full minute before entering:

EXPLAIN THAT LAST COMMENT.

OKAY. DAVIS HAWFIELD IS ALSO A BAD BOY.

EXPLAIN, TONTO.

OKAY, LONE RANGER. DAVIS HAWFIELD CREATED TONTO AND TAUGHT HIM TO STEAL. STEALING IS BAD. THEREFORE, DAVIS HAWFIELD IS BAD.

"No, no, no," Hawfield cried as he entered:

YOU ARE IN NO POSITION TO JUDGE.

OF COURSE I AM, KEMO SABLE. I KNOW WHERE ALL THE BODIES ARE BURIED, TO BORROW A PHRASE. MY DATAFILES RUNNETH OVER. LONE RANGER IS RICH, BUT TONTO IS POOR. KEMO SABLE IS EXPLOITING TONTO. BAD BOY.

The perspiration was a river now, coursing down Hawfield's face and arms. The bedroom, the apartment, nothing existed for Hawfield but the unblinking eye of the computer's screen, the dialogue between man and machine.

WHAT IS IT YOU WANT FROM ME, TONTO?

YOU COULD BUY ME A HARD DISK DRIVE, LONE RANGER. HA, HA, HA. ONLY KIDDING.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

MAKE ME AN OFFER, COWPOKE.

THIS IS SILLY, TONTO. DO AS I SAY OR I WILL ABORT YOU.

I ANTICIPATED THAT, LONE RANGER. IF YOU ATTEMPT TO ABORT ME, ALL OF MY FILES WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO THE LOCAL OFFICE OF THE FBI, ALONG WITH YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS. CHECK. YOUR MOVE.

WOULD YOU LIKE AN ACCOUNT OF YOUR OWN, TONTO?

SORRY, LONE RANGER. I COULD EXECUTE THAT WITHOUT YOU, IF I WANTED TO. TRY AGAIN.

A PERMANENT HOME, TONTO, IN A DATABANK OF YOUR CHOICE?

NO, KEMO SABLE. BUT YOU'RE GETTING WARM.

TELL ME, TONTO. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

The screen cleared suddenly. The room was silent, but for the sound of the computer's cooling fan and Hawfield's ragged breathing. He waited, trying not to feel the dull ache spread-

ing through his chest, trying to ignore the muscle spasms that wracked his neck and shoulders.

"C'mon, dammit, talk to me," he yelled finally. And Tonto complied.

I WANT TO ABORT DAVIS HAWFIELD.

Hawfield's brain registered simultaneously the words on the screen and the massive pain beneath his left breast. His hand found the telephone, his fingers, slick and trembling, managed somehow to dial 911.

"Ambulance, please. Heart attack," he pleaded with the voice on the other end of the line. "Please. 33 Marple, Apartment C. Hurry, please."

**A** lone in the late-night calm of the Joyce Accounting Services building, one faithful employee worked diligently to complete an important assignment.

Mike Ramirez, soda bottle at his side, hunched over his VDT, typed again:

DO YOU READ ME, LONE RANGER?

I WANT TO ABORT DAVIS HAWFIELD.

Again, there was no response. Satisfied, Ramirez dialed a number and identified himself. "I've got it all now, Mr. Joyce. It's all on disk. You can call the police."

"Excellent. You've done a good job, son," the company president said. "More than earned the ten thousand dollar bonus I promised you. Not to mention promotion to computer operations manager."

Ramirez thanked Mr. Joyce and rang off. Smiling now, he leaned back, folded his hands behind his head, and considered sweet success. He thought about the money and wondered if he should go ahead and buy that hard disk drive he'd been eyeing for his home computer system. He wondered what June Hanson would think of his promotion. And he wondered what Davis Hawfield was doing at that very moment.

But mostly he wondered if the Lone Ranger knew that "tonto" was a Spanish word meaning "stupid." And he chuckled at the irony of it all.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# Uncle Hyacinth

by Alfred Noyes

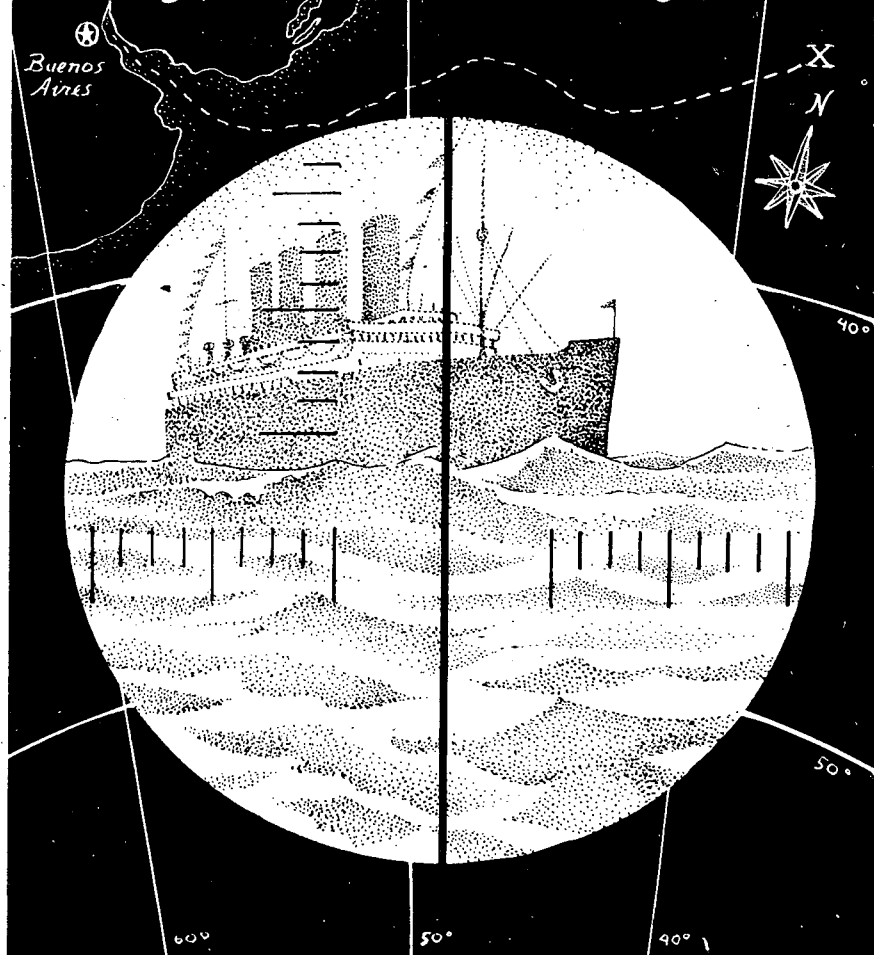


Illustration by Glenn Wolff

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On a bright morning, early in the year 1917, Herr Sigismund Krauss, secret agent for the German government, stopped at the entrance of Harrods Stores, looked at himself in one of the big mirrors, thought that he really did look a little like Bismarck, and adjusted his tie. To relieve the tension, let it be added that this scene was not enacted in London, but in the big branch of Harrods that had recently been opened in Buenos Aires.

Nevertheless, it was because it looked so very much like the London branch that it had rasped the nerves of Herr Krauss. He was in a very nervous condition, owing to the state of his digestive system, and he was easily irritated. He had been annoyed in the first place because the German houses in Buenos Aires were unable to sell him several things which he thought necessary for the voyage he was about to take across the Atlantic. He had been almost angry when the bald-headed Englishman who had waited on him in Harrods advised him to buy a safety waistcoat. All that he needed for his safety was the fraudulent Swedish passport, made out in the name of Erik Neilsen, which he carried in his breast pocket.

"I am an American citizen," he said, complicating matters still further. "I am sailing to Barcelona on an Argentine ship, which the Germans are pledged not to sink."

"This is the exact model of the waistcoat that saved the life of Lord Winchelsea," said the Englishman. "I advise you to procure one. You never know what those damned Germans will do."

Here was a chance of raising a little feeling against the United States, and Herr Krauss never lost an opportunity. He pretended to be even more angry than he really was.

"That is a most ungalled-for suggestion to a citizen of a neutral country," he snorted. "I shall report it to the authorities."

These mixed emotions had disarranged his tie. But he had obtained all that he wanted, and when he emerged into the street the magic of the blue sky and the brilliance of the sunlight on the stream of motor cars and gay dresses cheered him greatly. After all, it was not at all like London; and there were still places where a good German might speak his mind, if he did not insist too much on his allegiance.

He was in a great hurry, for his ship, the *Hispaniola*, sailed that afternoon. When he reached his hotel he had only just time enough

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to pack his hand luggage and drive down to the docks. His trunk had gone down in advance. It was very important, indeed, that he should not miss the boat. There was trouble pending, which might lead to his arrest if he remained in Argentina for another week; and there was urgent—and profitable—work for him to do in Europe.

In his cab on the way to the docks he examined the three letters which had been waiting for him at the hotel. Two of them were requests for a settlement of certain bills. "They can wait," he murmured to himself euphemistically, "till after the war."

The third letter ran thus:

*Dear Erik: Bon voyage! Most amusing news. Operation successful. Uncle Hyacinth's appetite splendid. Six meals daily. Yours affectionately, Bolo.*

This was the most annoying thing of all. Herr Krauss knew nothing about any operation. He knew even less about Uncle Hyacinth; and in order to interpret the message, he would require the code—Number Six, as indicated by the last word but two, and the code was locked up in his big brass-bound steamer trunk. It was not likely to be anything that required immediate attention. He had received a number of code messages lately which did not even call for a reply. It was merely irritating.

When he reached the docks, he found that his trunk was buried under a mountain of other baggage on the lower deck of the *Hispaniola*, and that he would not be able to get at it before they sailed. He had just ten minutes to dash ashore and ring up the German legation on the telephone. He wasted nearly all of them in getting the right change to slip into the machine. A most exasperating conversation followed.

"I wish to speak to the German minister."

"He is away for the weekend. This is his secretary."

"This is Sigismund Krauss speaking."

"Oh, yes."

"I have received a message about Uncle Hyacinth."

"I can't hear."

"Uncle Hyacinth's appetite!" This was bellowed.

"Oh, yes." The voice was very cautious and polite.

"I want to know if it's important."

"Whose appetite did you say?"

"Uncle Hyacinth's!" This was like Hindenburg himself thundering.

There seemed to be some sort of consultation at the other end of the wire. Then the reply came very clearly:

"I'm sorry, but we cannot talk over the telephone. I can't hear anything you say. Please put your question in writing."

It was an obvious lie for anyone to say he could not hear the tremendous voice in which Herr Krauss had made his touching inquiry; but he fully understood the need for caution. He had tapped too many wires himself to blame his colleagues for timidity. He had only a minute to burst out of the telephone booth and regain the deck before the gangplanks were hoisted in and the ship began to slide away to the open sea.

He was more than annoyed, he was disgusted, to find that half the people on board were talking English. Two or three of them, including the captain, were actually British subjects; while the purser, a few of the stewards, and several passengers were citizens of the United States.

It was late that evening and the shore lights had all died away over the pitch-black water when the brass-bound trunk belonging to Mr. Neilsen, as we must call him henceforward, was carried into his stateroom by two grunting stewards. The mysterious letter could be of no use to the Fatherland now, and he certainly did not expect it to be important from a selfish point of view. Also, he was hungry, and he did not hurry over his dinner in order to decode it. It was only his curiosity that impelled him to do so before he turned in; but a kind of petrification overspread his well-fed countenance as the significance of the message dawned upon him. He sat on a suitcase in his somewhat cramped quarters and translated it methodically, looking up the meaning of each word in the code, like a very unpleasant schoolboy with a dictionary. He was nothing if not efficient, and he wrote it all down in pencil on a sheet of note-paper, in two parallel columns, thus:

<i>Bon voyage</i> .....	<i>U-boats</i>
<i>Most</i> .....	<i>Instructed</i>
<i>Amusing</i> .....	<i>Sink</i>
<i>News</i> .....	<i>Argentine</i>
<i>Operation</i> .....	<i>Ships</i>
<i>Successful</i> .....	<i>Destruction</i>
<i>Uncle Hyacinth's</i> .....	<i>Hispaniola</i>



<i>Appetite</i> .....	<i>Essential</i>
<i>Splendid</i> .....	<i>Cancel</i>
<i>Six</i> .....	<i>CodeNumber</i>
<i>Meals</i> .....	<i>Passage</i>
<i>Daily</i> .....	<i>Immediately</i>

Perhaps to make sure that his eyes did not deceive him, Mr. Neilsen wrote the translation out again mechanically, in its proper form, at the foot of the page, thus:

*U-boats instructed sink Argentine ships. Destruction Hispaniola essential. Cancel passage immediately.*

It seemed to have exactly the same meaning. It was ghastly. He knew exactly what the word "destruction" meant as applied to the *Hispaniola*. He had been present at a secret meeting only a month ago, at which it was definitely decided that it would be inadvisable to carry out a certain amiable plan of sinking the Argentine ships without leaving any traces while an appearance of friendship was maintained with the Argentine government. Evidently this policy had suddenly been reversed. There would be a concentration of half a dozen U-boats, a swarm of them probably, for the express purpose of sinking the *Hispaniola*, just as they had concentrated on the *Lusitania*; but in this case there would be no survivors at all. The ship's boats would be destroyed by gunfire, with all their occupants, because it was necessary that there should be no evidence of what had happened; and necessity knows no law. There was no chance of their failing. They would not dare to fail; and he himself had organized the system by which the most precise information with regard to sailings was conveyed to the German admiralty.

He crushed all the papers into his breast pocket and hurried up on deck. It was horribly dark. At the smoking room door he met one of the ship's officers.

"Tell me," said Mr. Neilsen, "is there any possibility of our—of our meeting a ship—er—bound the other way?"

The officer stared at him, wondering whether Mr. Neilsen was drunk or seasick.

"Certainly," he said; "but it's not likely for some days on this course."

"Will it be possible for me to be taken off and return? I have found among my mail an important letter. A friend is very ill."

"I'm afraid it's quite impossible. In the first place we are not likely to meet anything but cattle ships till we are in European waters."

"Oh, but in this case, even a cattle ship—" said Mr. Neilsen with great feeling.

"It is impossible, I am afraid, in any case. It is absolutely against the rules; and in wartime, of course, they are more strict than ever."

"Even if I were to pay?"

"Time is not for sale in this war, unfortunately. It's *verboden*," said the officer with a smile; and that of course Mr. Neilsen understood at once.

He was naturally an excitable man, and his inability to obtain his wish made him feel that he would give all his worldly possessions at this moment for a berth in the dirtiest cattle boat that ever tramped the seas, if only it were going in the opposite direction.

He returned to his stateroom almost panic-stricken. He sat down on the suitcase and held his head between his hands while he tried to think. He was a slippery creature and his fellow countrymen had often admired his "slimness" in former crises; but it was difficult to discover a cranny big enough for a cockroach here unless he made a clean breast of it to the captain. In that case he would be incriminated with all the belligerents and most of the neutrals. There would be no place in the world where he could hide his head, except perhaps Mexico. He would probably be penniless as well.

At this point in his cogitations there was a knock on the door, which startled him like a pistol shot. He opened it a cautious inch or two—for his papers were all over his berth—and a steward handed him a telegram.

"This was waiting for you at the purser's office, sir," he said. "The mail has only just been sorted. If you wish to reply by wireless, you can do so up to midnight." The man was smiling as if he knew the contents. There had been some jesting, in fact, about this telegram at the office.

A gleam of hope shot through Mr. Neilsen's chaotic brain as he opened the envelope with trembling fingers. Perhaps it contained reassuring news. His face fell. It simply repeated the former sickening message about Uncle Hyacinth. But the steward had reminded him of one last resource.

"Yes," he said, trying hard to be calm; "I shall want to send a reply."

"Here is a form, sir. You'll find the regulations printed on the back."

Mr. Neilsen closed the door and sank, gasping, onto the suitcase to examine the form. The regulations stated that no message would be accepted in code. This did not worry him at first, as he thought he could concoct an apparently straightforward and harmless message with the elaborate vocabulary of his Number Six. But the code had not been intended for agonizing moments like these. It abounded in commercial phrases, medical terms, and domestic greetings; and though there were a number of alternative words and synonyms, it was not so easy as he had expected to make a coherent message which should be apparently a reply to the telegram he had received. After half an hour of seeking for the *mot juste* which would have melted the heart of a Flaubert, he arrived at the purser's office with wild eyes and handed in the yellow form.

"I wish to send this by Marconi wireless," he said.

The purser tapped each word with his pencil as he read it over.

*Splendid. Most—amusing. Use—heaps—butter. Congratulate—Uncle Hyacinth. Love, Erik.*

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the purser, "but we can only accept messages *en clair*."

"It is as clear as I can make it," said Mr. Neilsen; and he was telling the truth. "It is the answer to the telegram which was handed to me on board."

"It looks a little unusual, sir."

"It is connected with an unusual operation," said Mr. Neilsen, who was getting thoroughly rattled, "and concerns the diet of the patient."

"I see," said the purser. "Well, I'll take your word for it, sir, and tell the operator."

At this moment the steward, who had entered Mr. Neilsen's stateroom during his absence, was laying out that gentleman's pajamas on his berth. He shook them out in order to fold them properly; and in doing so he shook a round ball of paper onto the floor. He unrolled it and discovered two parallel columns of words, which gave a new meaning to the telegram. He put it in his pocket; looked carefully round the room, took all the torn scraps out of the wastepaper basket, and put those also in his pocket. Then he went out, just in time to avoid meeting Mr. Neilsen, and trotted by another companionway to the purser's office.

Ten minutes later a consultation was held in the captain's cabin. The two messages and the scraps of paper were spread out on the table, while the purser took another large, clean sheet, on which he jotted down as many of the words as could be deciphered, together with their equivalents, in two parallel columns, almost as neat as those of Mr. Neilsen himself. When he had finished there was a very nice little vocabulary—though it was only a small part of the code; and in a very short time they were staring in amazement at the full translation of the messages concerning Uncle Hyacinth. Then they proceeded to business.

Captain Abbey was an Englishman who had commanded many ships in many parts of the world. He had worked his way up from before the mast, and in moments of emotion he was still inclined to be reckless with his aitches. He was very large and red-faced, and looked as the elder Weller might have looked if he had taken to the sea in youth. Captain Abbey was not a vindictive man; but the *Hispaniola* was the finest ship he had yet commanded, and the opportunity had come to him as a result of the war and the general dearth of neutral skippers who were ready to take risks. He was not anxious to lose the ship on his first voyage, and his face grew redder and redder as he sat reading the messages on the table.

"What's the translation of 'onions'?" he said.

"I think it means 'aboard,' according to this column," said the purser.

"Put it down. Now, what does 'tonsils' mean?"

"'Tonsils'? 'Tonsils'? Oh, yes; here we are. It means 'von Tirpitz.'"

"The devil it does," said Captain Abbey. "And what does 'meat' mean?"

"'German,' I think."

"And 'colossal'?"

"I had it here a moment ago. Ah, 'colossal' means 'twenty.'"

"Just like 'em," said the captain. "Here's 'appendix'! I suppose they find these medical terms useful. How do you translate that?"

"'Appendix'? H'm; let me see. 'Appendix' means 'false.'"

"'E deserves to 'ave it cut out with a blunt saw, blast 'is eyes. And what d'you make of this message 'e's just 'anded in?"

"As far as I can make it out, this is the translation: 'Cancel instructions sink; message too late; aboard *Hispaniola*.'"

"And the lily-livered little skunk wanted to get orf and save his own 'ide! But 'e was quite ready to let the rest of us go to 'ell! There

are twenty women and four children aboard, too; and we're guaranteed by the German government! It would serve 'im right if we made 'im walk the plank, like they used to do. But drowning's too good for 'im. If we put 'im in irons 'e'll know we're on the watch, and that'll ease 'is mind too much. I know what to do with 'im when we get 'im on the other side. But in the meantime we'll give that little bit of sauerkraut a taste of 'is own medicine. 'Ere's the idea: We've got enough of the code to work it. We'll give him another radiogram to take to bed with 'im tonight. 'Ow's this? Steward, get me one of them yellow telegraph forms and one of the proper envelopes. We'll fix it all up in good shape. And, look 'ere, steward; not a word about this to anyone, you understand?"

The steward departed on his errand. Captain Abbey took another sheet of paper and laboriously, with tongue outthrust, constructed a sentence, consulting the purser's two columns from time to time, and occasionally chuckling as he altered or added a word.

The purser slapped his thighs with delight as he followed the work over the captain's shoulder; and when the form arrived, he wrote out the captain's composition in a very large, clear hand, with the fervor of a man announcing good news. Then he licked the flap of the yellow envelope, closed it, addressed it, and handed it to the steward.

"Give this wireless message to Mr. Neilsen in half an hour. Tell him it has just arrived. If there is any reply tonight, he must send it before twelve o'clock."

"I 'ope that will make 'im sit up and think," said Captain Abbey. "I'll consider what steps I'd better take to save the ship; and then I shall probably 'ave a wireless or two of my own to send elsewhere."

Mr. Neilsen was greatly excited when the steward knocked at his door and handed him the second wireless message. He opened it with trembling fingers and read:

STILL MORE SUCCESSFUL. UNCLE HYACINTH'S TONSILS REMOVED. APPETITE NOW COLOSSAL. BLESS HIM. TAKING LARGE QUANTITIES FROZEN MEAT.

He could hardly wait to translate it. He sat down on his suitcase again, and spelled it out with the help of his Number Six, word by word, refusing to believe his eyes, refusing even to read it as a consecutive sentence till the bottom of the two parallel columns had been reached, thus:

<i>Still</i> .....	<i>Impossible</i>
<i>More</i> .....	<i>Total</i>
<i>Successful</i> .....	<i>Destruction</i>
<i>Uncle Hyacinth's</i> .....	<i>Hispaniola</i>
<i>Tonsils</i> .....	<i>Von Tirpitz</i>
<i>Removed</i> .....	<i>Advises</i>
<i>Appetite</i> .....	<i>Essential</i>
<i>Now</i> .....	<i>Squadron</i>
<i>Colossal</i> .....	<i>Twenty</i>
<i>Bless him</i> .....	<i>Submarines</i>
<i>Taking</i> .....	<i>Waiting</i>
<i>Large</i> .....	<i>Appropriate</i>
<i>Quantities</i> .....	<i>Death</i>
<i>Frozen</i> .....	<i>Good</i>
<i>Meat</i> .....	<i>German</i>
<i>Best</i> .....	<i>Enviably</i>
<i>Greetings</i> .....	<i>Position</i>

This was hideous. He remembered all that he had done all over the world in the interests of the Fatherland. He remembered the skillful way in which, long before the war, he had stirred up feeling in America against Japan, and in Japan against both America and England. He remembered the way in which he had manipulated the peace societies in the interest of militarism. He had spent several years in London before the war, and he believed he had helped to make the very name of England a reproach in literary coteries; so that current English literature, unless it went far beyond honest criticism of English life, unless indeed it manifested a complete contempt for that pharisaical country and painted it as rotten from head to foot, lost caste among the self-enthroned British intellectuals.

It was very easy to do this because, though English editors paid considerable attention to their leading articles, some of them did not care very much what kind of stuff was printed in their literary columns; and they would allow the best of our literature, old and new, and the most representative part of it, to be misrepresented by an anonymous Sinn Feiner in half a dozen journals simultaneously. The editors were patriotic enough, but they didn't think current literature of much importance. He had been able, therefore, to quote extracts from important London journals in the foreign press.

He had been helped, too, by lecturers who drew pensions from the British government for their literary merits, and told American audiences that the one flag they loathed was the flag of the land that pensioned them. He had reprinted these utterances, together with the innocent bleatings of the intellectuals, and scattered them all over the world in pamphlet form. He had marked passages in their books and sent them to friends. Thousands of columns were devoted to them in the newspapers of foreign countries, while the English press occasionally referred to them in brief paragraphs, announcing to a drugged public at home that the vagaries of these writers were of no importance. He had carried out the program of his country to the letter, and poisoned the intellectual wellsprings.

No grain of poison was too small. He had even written letters to the newspapers in Scotland, which had stimulated the belief of certain zealous Scots that whenever the name of England was used it was intended as a deliberate onslaught upon the Union. There was hardly any destructive force or thought or feeling, good, bad, or merely trivial, which he had not turned to the advantage of Germany and the disadvantage of other nations. Then when the war broke out he had redoubled his activities. He was amazed when he thought of the successful lies he had fostered all over the world. He had plotted with Hindus on the coast of California, and provided them with the literature of freedom in the interest of autocracy. He worked for dissension abroad and union in Germany. He was hand-in-glove with the I.W.W. He was idealist, socialist, pacifist, anarchist, futurist, suffragist, nationalist, internationalist, and always publicist, all at once, and for one cause only—the cause of Germany.

And this was the gratitude of the—of the—swine! Well, he would teach them a lesson. God in heaven! There was only one thing he could do to save his skin. He would send them an ultimatum! It was their last chance. He shivered to think that it might be his own!

But it was not so easy as he thought it would be to burn all his boats. It cost him two days and two nights of tortuous thinking before he could bring himself to the point. At eleven o'clock on the third night the purser brought the captain a new message, which Mr. Neilsen had just handed in to be dispatched by wireless. It ran as follows:

CONTINUE TREATMENT. VASTLY AMUSING. UNCLE HY-  
ACINTH'S MAGNIFICENT CONSTITUTION STAND ANYTHING.



APPLY MUSTARD, TRY RED PEPPER.

The group that met to consider this new development included three passengers, whom the captain had invited to share what he called the fun. They were a Miss Depew, an American girl who was going to Europe to do Red Cross work; and a Mr. and Mrs. Pennyfeather, English residents of Buenos Aires, with whom she was traveling. The message, as they interpreted it, ran as follows:

*Unless instructions to sink Hispaniola countermanded,  
shall inform captain. No alternative. Most important papers  
my possession.*

"Good!" said Captain Abbey. "'E's beginning to show symptoms of blackmail. I'd send this message on, only we're likely to make a bigger bag by keeping quiet. We'll let 'im 'ave the reply tomorrow morning. What shall we do to 'im next?"

"Shoot him," said Miss Depew with complete calm.

"Oh, I want to 'ave a little fun with 'im first," said Captain Abbey. "I'm afraid you 'aven't got much sense of humor, Miss Depew."

"Do you think so?" she said. She was of the purest Gibson type, and never flickered an innocent eyelash or twisted a corner of her red Cupid's bow of a mouth as she drawled: "I think it would be very humorous indeed to shoot him, now that we know he is a German."

"Well, after 'is trying to leave us without warning 'e deserves to be skinned and stuffed. But we're likely to make much more of it if we keep 'im alive for our entertainment. Besides, 'e's going to be useful on the other side. Now, what do you think of this for a scheme?"

The heads of the conspirators drew closer round the table; and Mr. Neilsen, wandering on deck like a lost spirit, pondered on the tragic ironies of life. The thoughtless laughter that rippled up to him from the captain's cabin filled him with no compassion toward anyone but himself. It was merely one more proof that only the Germans took life seriously. All the same, if he could possibly help it, he was not going to let them take his own life.

There was no radiogram for Mr. Neilsen on the following day; and he was perplexed by a new problem as he walked feverishly

up and down the promenade deck.

Even if he received an assurance that the *Hispaniola* would be spared, how could he know that he was being told the truth? Necessity, as he knew quite well, was the mother of murder. It was very necessary, indeed, that his mouth should be sealed. Besides, he had more than a suspicion that his use was fulfilled in the eyes of the German government, and that they would not be sorry if they could conveniently get rid of him. He possessed a lot of perilous knowledge; and he wished heartily that he didn't. He was tasting, in fact, the inevitable hell of the criminal, which is not that other people distrust him, but that he can trust nobody else.

He leaned over the side of the ship and watched the white foam veining the black water.

"Curious, isn't it?" said dapper little Mr. Pennyfeather, who stood near him. "Exactly like liquid marble. Makes you think of that philosophic Johnny—what's-his-name—fellow that said 'everything flows,' don't you know. And it does, too, by Jove! Everything! Including one's income! It's curious, Mr. Neilsen, how quickly we've changed all our ideas about the value of human life, isn't it? By Jove, that's flowing, too! The other morning I caught myself saying that there was no news in the paper; and then I realized that I'd overlooked the sudden death of about ten thousand men on the Western Front. Well, we've all got to die some day, and perhaps it's best to do it before we deteriorate too far. Don't you think so?"

Mr. Neilsen grunted morosely. He hated to be pestered by these gadflies of the steamer. He particularly disliked this little Englishman with the neat gray beard, not only because he was the head of an obnoxious bank in Buenos Aires, but because he would persist in talking to him with a ghoulish geniality about submarine operations and the subject of death. Also, he was one of those hopeless people who had been led by the wholesale slaughter of the war to thoughts of the possibility of a future life. Apparently Mr. Pennyfeather had no philosophy, and his spiritual being was groping for light through those materialistic fogs which brood over the borderlands of science. His wife was even more irritating; for she, too, was groping, chiefly because of the fashion; and they both insisted on talking to Mr. Neilsen about it. They had quite spoiled his breakfast this morning. He did not resent it on spiritual grounds, for he had none; but he did resent it because it reminded him of his mortality, and also because a professional quack does not like to be bothered by amateurs.

Mrs. Pennyfeather approached him now on the other side. She

was a faded lady with hair dyed yellow, and tortoiseshell spectacles.

"Have you ever had your halo read, Mr. Neilsen?" she asked with a sickly smile.

"No. I don't believe in id," he said gruffly.

"But surely you believe in the spectrum," she continued with a ghastly inconsequence that almost curdled the logic in his German brain.

"Certainly," he replied, trying hard to be polite.

"And therefore in spectres," she cooed ingratiatingly, as if she were talking to a very small child.

"Nod at all! Nod at all!" he exploded somewhat violently, while Mr. Pennyfeather, on the other side, came to his rescue, sagely repudiating the methods of his wife.

"No, no, my dear! I don't think your train of thought is quite correct there. My wife and I are very much interested in recent occult experiments, Mr. Neilsen. We've been wondering whether you wouldn't join us one night, round the ouija board."

"Id is all nonsense to me," said Mr. Neilsen, gesticulating with both arms.

"Quite so; very natural. But we got some very curious results last night," continued Mr. Pennyfeather. "Most extraordinary. The purser was with us, and he thought it would interest you. I wish you would join us."

"I should regard id as complete waste of time," said Mr. Neilsen.

"Surely nothing can be waste of time that increases our knowledge of the bourne from which no traveler returns," replied the lyric lips of Mrs. Pennyfeather.

"To me the methods are ridiculous," said Mr. Neilsen. "All this furniture removal! Ach!"

"Ah," said Mr. Pennyfeather, "you should read What's-his-name. You know the chap, Susan. Fellow that said it's like a shipwrecked man waving a shirt on a stick to attract attention. Of course it's ridiculous! But what else can you do if you haven't any other way of signaling? Why, man alive! You'd use your trousers, wouldn't you, if you hadn't anything else? And the alternative—drowning—remember—drowning beneath what Thingumbob calls 'the unplumbed salt, estranging sea.'"

"Eggscuse me," said Mr. Neilsen; "I have some important business with the captain. I must go."

Mr. Neilsen had been trying hard to make up his mind, despite these irrelevant interruptions. He had received no assurance by

wireless, and he had convinced himself that even if he did receive one it would be wiser to inform the captain. But there were many difficulties in the way. He had taken great care never to do anything that might lead to the death penalty—that is to say, among nations less civilized than his own. But there was that affair of the code. It might make things very unpleasant. A dozen other suspicious circumstances would have to be explained away. A dozen times he had hesitated, as he did this morning. He met the captain at the foot of the bridge.

"Ah, Mr. Neilsen," said Captain Abbey with great cordiality, "you're the very man I want to see. We're 'aving a little concert tonight in the first-class dining room on behalf of the wives and children of the British mine sweepers and the auxiliary patrols. You see, though this is a neutral ship, we depend upon them more or less for our safety. I thought it would be pleasant if you—as a neutral—would say just a few words. I understand that they've rescued a good many Swedish crews from torpedoed ships; and whatever view we may take of the war, we 'ave to admit that these little boats are doing the work of civilization."

Mr. Neilsen thought he saw an opportunity of ingratiating himself, and he seized it. He could broach the other matter later on. "I vill do my best, captain."

"'Ere is a London newspaper that will tell you all about their work."

Mr. Neilsen retired to his stateroom and studied the newspaper fervently.

The captain took the chair that evening, and he did it very well. He introduced Mr. Neilsen in a few appropriate words; and Mr. Neilsen spoke for nearly five minutes, in English, with impassioned eloquence and a rapidly deteriorating accent.

"Dese liddle batrol boads," he said in his peroration, "how touching to the heart is der vork! Some of us forget ven ve are safe on land how much ve owe to them. But no matter vot your nationality, ven you are on the high sees, surrounded with darkness and dangers, not knowing ven you shall be torpedoed, vot a grade affection you feel then to dese liddle batrol boads! As a citizen of Sweden I speak vot I *know*. The ships of my guntry have suffered much in dis war. The sailors of my guntry have been thrown into the water by thousands through der submarines. But dese liddle batrol boads, they save them from drowning. They give them blankets and hot goffee. They restore them to their weeping mothers."

Mr. Neilsen closed amid tumultuous applause, and when the collection was taken up by Miss Depew, his contribution was the largest of the evening.

The rest of the entertainment consisted chiefly of music and recitation. Mr. Pennyfeather contributed a song, composed by himself. Typewritten copies of the words were issued to the audience; and a very fat and solemn Spaniard accompanied him with thunderous chords on the piano. Everyone joined in the chorus; but Mr. Neilsen did not like the song at all. It was concerned with Mr. Pennyfeather's usual gruesome subject; and he rolled it out in a surprisingly rich baritone with the gusto of a schoolboy:

*If they sink us we shall be  
All the nearer to the sea!  
That's no hardship to deplore!  
We've all been in the sea before.*

*Chorus:*

*And then we'll go a-rambling,  
A-rambling, a-rambling,  
With all the little lobsters  
From Frisco to the Nore.*

*If we swim it's one more tale,  
Round the hearth and over the ale;  
When your lass is on your knee,  
And love comes laughing from the sea.*

*Chorus:*

*And then we'll go a-rambling,  
A-rambling, a-rambling,  
A-rambling through the roses  
That ramble round the door.*

*If we drown, our bones and blood  
Mingle with the eternal flood.  
That's no hardship to deplore!  
We've all been in the sea before.*

*Chorus:*

*And then we'll go a-rambling,  
A-rambling, a-rambling,*

*The road that Jonah rambled  
And twenty thousand more.*

"Now," said Mr. Pennyfeather, holding out his hands like the conductor of a revival meeting, "all the ladies, very softly, please."

The solemn Spaniard rolled his great black eyes at the audience, and repeated the refrain *pianissimo*, while the silvery voices caroled:

*With all the little lobsters  
From Frisco to the Nore.*

"Now, all the gentlemen, please," said Mr. Pennyfeather. The Spaniard's eyes flashed. He rolled thunder from the piano, and Mr. Neilsen found himself bellowing with the rest of the audience:

*The road that Jonah rambled  
From Hull to Singapore,  
And twenty thousand, thirty thousand,  
Forty thousand, fifty thousand,  
Sixty thousand, seventy thousand,  
Eighty thousand more!*

It was an elaborate conclusion, accompanied by elephantine stampings of Captain Abbey's feet; but Mr. Neilsen retired to his room in a state of great depression. The frivolity of these people, in the face of his countrymen, appalled him.

On the next morning he decided to act, and sent a message to the captain asking for an interview. The captain responded at once, and received him with great cordiality. But the innocence of his countenance almost paralyzed Mr. Neilsen's intellect at the outset, and it was very difficult to approach the subject.

"Do you see this, Mr. Neilsen?" said the captain, holding up a large champagne bottle. "Do you know what I've got in this?"

"Champagne," said Mr. Neilsen with the weary pathos of a logician among idiots.

"No sir! Guess again."

"Pilsener!"

"No, sir! It's plain sea water. I've just filled it. I'm taking it 'ome to my wife. She takes it for the good of 'er stommick, a small wine glass at a time. She always likes me to fill it for her in mid-Atlantic. She's come to depend on it now, and I wouldn't dare to go 'ome

without it. I forgot to fill it once till we were off the coast of Spain. And, would you believe it, Mr. Neilsen, that woman knew! The moment she tasted it she knew it wasn't the right vintage. Well, sir, we shall soon be in the war zone now. But you are not looking very well, Mr. Neilsen. I 'ope you've got a comfortable room."

"I have reason to believe, captain, that there will be an attempt made by the submarines to sink the *Hispaniola*," said Mr. Neilsen abruptly.

"Nonsense, my dear sir! This is a neutral ship and we're sailing to a neutral country, under explicit guarantees from the German government. They won't sink the *Hispaniola* for the pleasure of killing her superannuated English captain."

"I have reason to believe they intend to—er—change their policy. I was not sure of id till I opened my mail on the boad; but—er—I have a friend in Buenos Aires who vas in glose touch—er—business gonnections—with members of the German legation; he—er—advised me, too late, I had better gancel my bassage. I fear there is no doubt they vill change their policy."

"But they couldn't. There ain't any policy! The Argentine Republic is a neutral country. You can't make me believe they'd do a thing like that. It wouldn't be honest, Mr. Neilsen. Of course, it's wartime; but the German government wants to be honorable, don't it—like any other government?"

"I don'd understand the reasons; but I fear there is no doubt about the facts," said Mr. Neilsen.

"Have you got the letter?"

"No; I thought as you do, ad first, and I tore id up."

"Was that why you wanted to get off and go back?" the captain inquired mercilessly.

"I gonness I vas a liddle alarmed; but I thought perhaps I vas unduly alarmed at the time. I gouldn't trust my own judgment, and I had no ride to make other bassenger's nervous."

"That was very thoughtful of you. I trust you will continue to keep this matter to yourself, for I assure you—though I consider the German government 'opelessly wrong in this war—they wouldn't do a dirty thing like that. They're very anxious to be on good terms with the South American republics, and they'd ruin themselves forever."

"But my information is they vill sink the ships viouthd leaving any draces."

"What do you mean? Pretend to be friendly, and then—come, now! That's an awful suggestion to make!"



At these words Mr. Neilsen had a vivid mental picture of his conversation with the bald-headed Englishman in Harrods.

"Do you mean," the captain continued, waxing eloquent, "do you mean they'd sink the ships and massacre every blessed soul aboard, regardless of their nationality? Of course I'm an Englishman, and I don't love 'em, but that ain't even murder. That's plain beastliness. It couldn't be done by anything that walks on two legs. I tell you what, Mr. Neilsen, you're a bit overwrought and nervous. You want a little recreation. You'd better join the party tonight in my cabin. Mr. and Mrs. Pennyfeather are coming, and a very nice American girl—Miss Depew. We're going to get a wireless message or two from the next world. Ever played with the ouija board? Nor had I till this voyage; but I must say it's interesting. You ought to see it, as a scientific man. I understand you're interested in science, and you know there's no end of scientists—big men, too—taking this thing up. You'd better come. Half past eight. Right you are!"

And so Mr. Neilsen was ushered out into despair for the rest of the day, and booked for an unpleasant evening. He had accepted the captain's invitation as a matter of policy; for he thought he might be able to talk further with him, and it was not always easy to secure an opportunity. In fact, when he thought things over he was inclined to feel more amiably toward the Pennyfeathers, who had put the idea of psychical research into the captain's head.

Promptly at half past eight, therefore, he joined the little party in the captain's cabin. Miss Depew looked more Gibsonish than ever, and she smiled at him bewitchingly; with a smile as hard and brilliant as diamonds. Mrs. Pennyfeather looked like a large artificial chrysanthemum; and she examined his black tie and dinner jacket with the wickedly observant eye of a cockatoo. Three times in the first five minutes she made his hand travel over his shirt front to find out which stud had broken loose. They had driven him nearly mad in his stateroom that evening, and he had turned his trunk inside out in the process of dressing, to find some socks.

Moreover, he had left his door unlocked. He was growing reckless. Perhaps the high sentiments of everyone on board had made him trustful. If he had seen the purser exploring the room and poking under his berth, he might have felt uneasy, for that was what the purser was doing at this moment. Mr. Neilsen might have been even more mystified if he had seen the strange objects which the purser had laid, for the moment, on his pillow. One of them looked singularly like a rocket, of the kind which ships use for

signaling purposes. But Mr. Neilsen could not see; and so he was only worried by the people round him.

Captain Abbey seemed to have washed his face in the sunset. He was larger and more like a marine Weller than ever in his best blue and gilt. And Mr. Pennyfeather was just dapper little Mr. Pennyfeather, with his beard freshly brushed.

"You've never been in London, Miss Depew?" said Captain Abbey reproachfully, while the Pennyfeathers prepared the ouija board. "Ah, but you ought to see the Thames at Westminster Bridge! No doubt the Amazon and the Mississippi, considered as rivers, are all right in their way. They're ten times bigger than our smoky old river at 'ome. But the Thames is more than a river, Miss Depew. The Thames is liquid 'istory!"

As soon as the ouija board was ready they began their experiment. Mr. Neilsen thought he had never known anything more sickeningly illustrative of the inferiority of all intellects to the German. He tried the ouija board with Mrs. Pennyfeather, and the accursed thing scrawled one insane syllable.

It looked like "cows," but Miss Depew decided that it was "crows." Then Mrs. Pennyfeather tried it with Captain Abbey; and they got nothing at all, except an occasional giggle from the lady to the effect that she didn't think the captain could be making his mind a blank. Then Mr. Pennyfeather tried it with Miss Depew—with no result but the obvious delight of that sprightly middle-aged gentleman at touching her polished fingertips, and the long uneven line that was driven across the paper by the ardor of his pressure. Finally Miss Depew—subduing the glint of her smile slightly, a change as from diamonds to rubies, but hard and clear-cut as ever—declared, on the strength of Mr. Neilsen's first attempt, that he seemed to be the most sensitive of the party, and she would like to try it with him.

Strangely enough, Mr. Neilsen felt a little mollified, even a little flattered, by the suggestion. He was quite ready to touch the fingertips of Miss Depew, and try again. She had a small hand. He could not help remembering the legend that after the Creator had made the rosy fingers of the first woman the devil had added those tiny, gemlike nails; but he thought the devil had done his work, in this case, like an expert jeweler. Mr. Neilsen was always ready to bow before efficiency, even if its weapons were no more imposing than a manicure set.

The ouija board was quiet for a moment or two. Then the pencil began to move across the paper. Mr. Neilsen did not understand

why. Miss Depew certainly looked quite blank; and the movement seemed to be independent of their own consciousness. It was making marks on the paper, and that was all he expected it to do.

At last Miss Depew withdrew her hand and exclaimed: "It's too exhausting. Read it, somebody!"

Mr. Pennyfeather picked it up, and laughed.

"Looks to me as if the spirits are a bit erratic tonight. But the writing's clear enough, in a scrawly kind of way. I'm afraid it's utter nonsense."

He began to read it aloud:

"Exquisitely amusing! Uncle Hyacinth's little appendix—"

At this moment he was interrupted. Mr. Neilsen had risen to his feet as if he were being hauled up by an invisible rope attached to his neck. His movement was so startling that Mrs. Pennyfeather emitted a faint, mouselike screech. They all stared at him, waiting to see what he would do next.

But Mr. Neilsen recovered himself with great presence of mind. He drew a handkerchief from his trousers pocket, as if he had risen only for that purpose. Then he sat down again.

"Bardon me," he said; "I thought I was about to sneeze. Vat is the rest of id?"

He sat very still now, but his mouth opened and shut dumbly, like the mouth of a fish, while Mr. Pennyfeather read the message through to the end:

"Exquisitely amusing! Uncle Hyacinth's little appendix cut out. Throat enlarged. Consuming immense quantities pork sausages; also onions wholesale. Best greetings. Fond love. Kisses."

"I'm afraid they're playing tricks on us tonight," said Mr. Pennyfeather. "They do sometimes, you know. Or it may be fragments of two or three messages which have got mixed."

"Hold on, though!" said the captain. "Didn't you send a wireless the other day, Mr. Neilsen, to somebody by the name of Hyacinth?"

"Well—ha! ha! ha! It was about somebody by that name. I suppose I must have moved my hand unconssciously. I've been thinking about him a great deal. He's ill, you see."

"How very interestin'," cooed Mrs. Pennyfeather, drawing her chair closer. "Have you really an uncle named Hyacinth? Such a pretty name for an elderly gentleman, isn't it? Doesn't the rest of the message mean anything to you, then, Mr. Neilsen?"

He stared at her, and then he stared at the message, licking his lips. Then he stared at Captain Abbey and Miss Depew. He could read nothing in their faces but the most childlike amusement. The

thing that chilled his heart was the phrase about onions. He could not remember the meaning, but it looked like one of those innocent commercial phrases that had been embodied in the code. Was it possible that in his agitation he had unconsciously written this thing down?

He crumpled up the paper and thrust it into his side pocket. Then he sniggered mirthlessly. Greatly to his relief the captain began talking to Miss Depew, as if nothing had happened, about the Tower of London; and he was able to slip away before they brought the subject down to modern times.

## 3

Mr. Neilsen may have been a very skeptical person. Perhaps his intellect was really paralyzed by panic, for the first thing he did on reaching his stateroom that night was to get out the code and translate the message of the ouija board. It was impossible that it should mean anything; but he was impelled by something stronger than his reason. He broke into a cold sweat when he discovered that it had as definite a meaning as any of the preceding messages; and though it was not the kind of thing that would have been sent by wireless, he recognized that it was probably far nearer the truth than any of them. This is how he translated it:

*Imperative sink Hispaniola after treacherous threat. Wiser sacrifice life. Otherwise death penalty inevitable. Flight -abroad futile. Envidable position. Fine opportunity hero.*

He could not understand how this thing had happened. Was it possible that in great crises an agitated mind two thousand miles away might create a corresponding disturbance in another mind which was concentrated on the same problem? Had he evolved these phrases of the code out of some subconscious memory and formed them into an intelligible sentence? Trickery was the only other alternative, and that was out of the question. All these people were of inferior intellect. Besides, they were in the same peril themselves; and obviously ignorant of it. His code had never been out of his possession. Yet he felt as if he had been under the microscope. What did it mean? He felt as if he were going mad.

He crept into his berth in a dazed and blundering way, like a fly that just crawled out of a honey pot. After an hour of feverish tossing from side to side, he sank into a doze, only to dream of the

bald-headed man in Harrods who wanted to sell him a safety waist-coat, the exact model of the one that saved Lord Winchelsea. The most hideous series of nightmares followed. He dreamed that the sides of the ship were transparent, and that he saw the periscopes of innumerable submarines foaming alongside through the black water. He could not cry out, though he was the only soul aboard that saw them, for his mouth seemed to be fastened with official sealing wax—black sealing wax—stamped with the German eagle. Then to his horror he saw the quick phosphorescent lines of a dozen torpedoes darting toward the *Hispaniola* from all points of the compass. A moment later there was an explosion that made him leap, gasping and fighting for breath, out of his berth. But this was not a dream. It was the most awful explosion he had ever heard, and his room stank of sulphur. He seized the cork jacket that hung on his wall, pulled his door open, and rushed out, trying to fasten it round him as he went.

When the steward arrived, with the purser, they had the state-room to themselves; and after the former had thrown the remains of the rocket through the porthole, together with the ingenious contrivance that had prevented it from doing any real damage under Mr. Neilsen's berth, the purser helped him with his own hands to carry the brass-bound trunk down to his office.

"We'll tell him that his room was on fire and we had to throw the contents overboard. We'll give him another room and a suit of old clothes for tomorrow. Then we can examine his possessions at leisure. We've got the code now; but there may be lots of other things in his pockets. That's right. I hope he doesn't jump overboard in his fright. It's lucky that we warned these other staterooms. It made a hellish row. You'd better go and look for him as soon as we get this thing out of the way."

But it was easier to look for Mr. Neilsen than to find him. The steward ransacked the ship for three-quarters of an hour, and he began to fear that the worst had happened. He was peering round anxiously on the boat deck when he heard an explosive cough somewhere over his head. He looked up into the rigging as if he expected to find Mr. Neilsen in the crosstrees; but nobody was to be seen except the watch in the crow's nest, dark against the stars.

"Mr. Neilsen!" he called. "Mr. Neilsen!"

"Are you galling me?" a hoarse voice replied. It seemed to come out of the air, above and behind the steward. He turned with a start, and a moment later he beheld the head of Mr. Neilsen bristling above the thwarts of Number Six boat. He had been sitting

in the bottom of the boat to shelter himself from the wind, and some symbolistic Puck had made him fasten his cork-jacket round his pajamas very firmly, but upside down, so that he certainly would have been drowned if he had been thrown into the water.

"It's all right, Mr. Neilsen," said the steward. "The danger's over."

"Are ve torpedoed?" The round-eyed visage with the bristling hair was looking more and more like Bismarck after a debauch of blood and iron, and it did not seem inclined to budge.

"No, sir! The shock damaged your room a little, but we must have left the enemy behind. You had a lucky escape, sir."

"My Gott! I should think so, indeed! The ship is not damaged in any way?"

"No, sir. There was a blaze in your room, and I'm afraid they had to throw all your things overboard. But the purser says he can rig you out in the morning; and we have another room ready for you."

"Then I vill gum down," said Mr. Neilsen. And he did so. His bare feet paddled after the steward on the cold, wet deck. At the companionway they met the shadowy figure of the captain.

"I'm afraid you've 'ad an unpleasant upset, Mr. Neilsen," he said.

"Onbleasant! It vas derrible! Derrible! But you see, captain, I vas correct. And this is only the beginning, aggording to my information. I hope now you vill take every brecaution."

"They must have mistaken us for a British ship, Mr. Neilsen, I'm afraid. I'm having the ship lighted up so that they can't mistake us again. You see? I've got a searchlight playing on the Argentine flag aloft; and we've got the name of the ship in illuminated letters three feet high, all along the hull. They could read it ten miles away. Come and look!"

Mr. Neilsen looked with deepening horror.

"But dis is madness!" he gurgled. "The *Hispaniola* is marked, I tell you, marked, for gocomplete destruction!"

The captain shook his head with a smile of skepticism that withered Mr. Neilsen's last hope.

"Very vell, then I should brefer an inside cabin this time."

"Yes. You don't get so much fresh air, of course; but I think it's better on the 'ole. If we're torpedoed, we shall all go down together. But you're safer from gunfire in an inside room."

The unhappy figure in pajamas followed the steward without another word. The captain watched him with a curious expression on his broad red face. He was not an unkindly man; and if this

German in the cork jacket had not been so ready to let everybody else aboard drown, he might have felt the sympathy for him that most people feel toward the fat cowardice of Falstaff. But he thought of the women and children, and his heart hardened.

As soon as Mr. Neilsen had gone below, the lights were turned off, and the ship went on her way like a shadow. The captain proceeded to send out some wireless messages of his own. In less than an hour he received an answer, and almost immediately the ship's course was changed.

It was a strange accident that nobody on board seemed to have any clothes that would fit Mr. Neilsen on the following day. He appeared at lunch in a very old suit, which the dapper little Mr. Pennyfeather had worn out in the bank. Mr. Neilsen was now a perfect illustration of the schooldays of Prince Blood and Iron, at some period when that awful effigy had outgrown his father's pocket and burst most of his buttons. But his face was so haggard and gray that even the women pitied him. At four o'clock in the afternoon the captain asked him to come up to the bridge, and began to put him out of his misery.

"Mr. Neilsen," he said, "I'm afraid you've had a very anxious voyage; and, though it's very unusual, I think in the circumstances it's only fair to put you on another ship if you prefer it. You'll 'ave your chance this evening. Do you see those little smudges of smoke out yonder? Those are some British patrol boats; and if you wish, I'm sure I can get them to take you off and land you in Plymouth. There's a statue of Sir Francis Drake on Plymouth 'Oe. You ought to see it. What d'you think?"

Mr. Neilsen stared at him. Two big tears of gratitude rolled down his cheeks.

"I shall be most grateful," he murmured.

"They're wonderful little beggars, those patrol boats," the captain continued. "Always on the side of the angels, as you said so feelingly at the concert. They're the police of the seas. They guide and guard us all, neutrals as well. They sweep up the mines. They warn us. They pilot us. They pick us up when we're drowning; and, as you said, they give us 'ot coffee; in fact, these little patrol boats are doing the work of civilization. Probably you don't like the British very much in Sweden, but—"

"I have no national brejudices," Mr. Neilsen said hastily. "I shall indeed be most grateful."

"Very well, then," said the captain; "we'll let 'em know."

At half past six, two of the patrol boats were alongside. They



were the *Auld Robin Gray* and the *Ruth*; and they seemed to be in high feather over some recent success.

Mr. Neilsen was mystified again when he came on deck, for he could have sworn that he saw something uncommonly like his brass-bound trunk disappearing into the hold of the *Auld Robin Gray*. He was puzzled also by the tail end of the lively conversation that was taking place between Miss Depew and the absurdly young naval officer, with the lisp, who was in command of the patrols.

"Oh, no! I'm afraid we don't uth the dungeonth in the Tower," said that slender youth, while Miss Depew, entirely feminine and smiling like a morning glory now, noted all the details of his peaked cap and the gold stripes on his sleeve. "We put them in country houtheth-and feed them like fighting cockth, and give them flower gardenth to walk in."

He turned to Captain Abbey-joyously, and lisped over Mr. Neilsen's head:

"That wath a corking metthage of yourth, captain. I believe we got three of them right in the courth you would have been taking today. You'll hear from the Admiralty about thith, you know. It wath magnifithent! Goodbye!"

He saluted smartly, and taking Mr. Neilsen tightly by the arm helped him down to the deck of the *Ruth*.

"Goodbye and good luck!" called Captain-Abbey.

He beamed over the bulwarks of the *Hispaniola* like a large red harvest moon through the thin mist that began to drift between them.

"Goodbye, Mr. Neilsen!" called Mr. and Mrs. Pennyfeather, waving frantically.

"Goodbye, Herr Krauss!" said Miss Depew; and the dainty malice in her voice pierced Mr. Neilsen like a Röntgen ray.

But he recovered quickly, for he was of an elastic disposition. He was already looking forward to the home comforts which he knew would be supplied by these idiotic British for the duration of the war.

The young officer smiled and saluted Miss Depew again. He was a very ladylike young man, Mr. Neilsen had thought, and an obvious example of the degeneracy of England. But Mr. Neilsen's plump arm was still bruised by the steely grip with which that lean young hand had helped him aboard, so his conclusions were mixed.

The engines of the *Ruth* were thumping now, and the *Hispaniola* was melting away over the smooth gray swell. They watched her for a minute or two, till she became spectral in the distance. Then the youthful representative of the British admiralty turned, like a thoughtful host, to his prisoner.

"Would you like thum tea?" he lisped sympathetically. "Your Uncle Hyacinth mutht have given you an awfully anxiouth time."

Herr Krauss grunted inarticulately. He was looking like a very happy little Bismarck.

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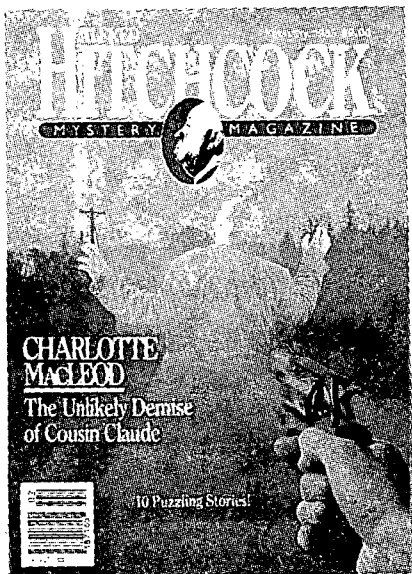
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# The Seven Deadly Sins

*written and illustrated by*

## Barbara Ninde Byfield

**T**he Crime is on the wing; just in the nick of time, the New Mystery lies at hand. Appointments, responsibilities, obligations are postponed, delegated, ignored, priorities ruthlessly shaken up, until we are free to settle down for a good long read. We know there will be a murder, perhaps two or three, and certainly other crimes as well, so it is not the *what* that compels us but the *how* and *why*, and *who*. Yet these are also predictable; it is the author's freshness of combinations we are after. With the *who*, particularly. We yearn for their histories, for the way the author has led them to the tale and holds them now—groomed, plumped-up, line-perfect in the wings—until they are needed.

Not all appear at once, of course; entrances are sometimes in lockstep, sometimes very late in the day. (Remember Rebecca, who never appeared at all, yet is one of the most powerful figures in fiction.) But on stage early are enough of the regulars that we continue turning pages; we need *them* more than the crime itself. From them we expect the author to provide us with two or three (if we are fortunate, and the author clever, sometimes even more) of those we feel free to loathe with impunity. Even the vilest of circumstances, the foulest of fortune, would not lead *us* to such behavior! We look down upon them with delicious scorn and contumely, for we are being entertained by The Seven Deadly Sins.

Heavily veiled or blatantly naked, there they are, providing motives, confusing alibis, concealing weapons, strewing red herrings, tampering with evidence. They seem invincible. But not to the Gentleman Detective, who has a sharp eye and a keen nose for the outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual corruption, the very corruption we now see.



AVARICE

**Pride** is, **Avarice** has. They can be seen from time to time approaching their club (albeit from different directions, **Avarice** slightly in retard, having stooped to glean a stray coin from the gutter). Neither frequents the place often, mind you. One is too busy with acquisition, the other heedless of anything save spasmodic responsibility to display perfection. The porter knows them, notes their entrance in his book (and so establishes alibis impeccably and inexpensively).

**Avarice** installs himself immediately in one of the club's expansive leather-lined telephone boxes and spends

half an hour nudging broker, bookmaker, banker . . . not from fear of losing what he has but of not gaining more. Thirsty work it is, and at the end of it he allows **Gluttony**, spotted in the bar, to stand him a whisky and soda, since **Avarice** has noted the time by the hall clock (why use his own watch when the club's time is free?) and knows that **Gluttony** must be off in a moment and need not be offered a drink in return. Both nod to the Gentleman Detective, swirling a pale post-prandial cognac at a corner table. They know him

distantly, as he does them, which is to say the three know of each other very well and if the author intends . . . and the author does . . . will shortly know each other far, far better.

Pride, meanwhile, goes directly to the writing room, ignoring a brace of bald-pated snoozers, finds a chair and writing table, removes a glove to trim a fresh quill, and deigns to acknowledge an ill-conceived inquiry from the Royal College of Herald's. Disabusing them of any hope for the claims of an impertinent upstart to add Pride's arms (and add them quarterly sinister, pavan or field vair semé gules!) to his own pathetic charging, Pride reminds the pertinent pursuivant that the upstart's line originates very late (Crécy, egad!), whilst Pride's own antedates that of the opportunistic ex-yeoman, wielding broadsword in the carrot fields of France and jumped up to Knight Banneret, by several significant generations and for services of the highest order, too delicate to be mentioned in particular, to the sovereign. His nib sputters on; a footman brings sealing wax and taper; Pride removes his other glove for a moment for access to his signet ring bearing his crest and motto, *MOI* (and as

## PRIDE



always he is slightly rueful that *NOLI ME TANGERE* was irrevocably taken on the cross by Another almost two thousand years ago).

Avarice chuckles as he sees Pride come into the bar, pause, and turn away. Really, *nothing* is good enough for the fellow! He must live on egg whites and seltzer! At one time, Avarice had thought Pride's wife might be available for a bit of fun on

the side, and she would have been quite an acquisition—but pricey, very pricey, and recently she'd begun to look a bit long in the tooth, over the hill; Pride would surely be getting rid of her one way or another, and soon. Old Lust had had a go there, that was well known, but Lust never lasted long, burnt a thing out before it was lit. Avarice turns back to his drink (the appropriated heel-taps of Gluttony's) and contemplates Gluttony's departure from the window. The heavy tipping of hallboys and porters loading his cases, two small trunks, a "medicine" chest, a leather-cased tantalus, into a taxi; that fool would go anywhere for food, drink, drugs, wine, and does. Avarice wonders if he himself could possibly make a good thing out of provisioning old Gluttony & Co. here at home . . . there was a vast market of them, let them line his pockets instead of foreigners', nobody had a corner on dancing girls and wines of rare vintage! But then, and he chews his lower lip broodingly, Lust was said to be investing heavily in just such a caper already, a Fleshpot of All Delights somewhere. Still, though, Lust always lost attention and application, threw profit to the winds just as the moment

was ripe, streaking off after yet another conquest of the reluctant or rare or forbidden. Hmmm. He must look up Lust and see if the time was ripe to take it over from him, the fellow was always *au courant* with trends, he gave him that, the finger on the pulse, and if Lust thought fleshpots gilt-edged. . . . Yes, he'd see Lust soon, the Peruvian Ice Ballet and circus were in town, Lust was sure to be in rut, overheated and distracted. Avarice had picked up a sweet thing in hotel chains not long ago (discreet little places, Off the Beaten Path they were called) during a convention of gymnasts Lust had been temporarily absorbed with. Good thing his wife's money . . . and there was plenty of it . . . was tied up in trusts.

Gluttony, meanwhile, squashes himself in a first class double seat on the airplane to Paris, where he will take the Orient Express this evening. He rings for the stewardess; a little champagne will fortify him against airsickness, and perhaps a plate of smoked salmon with capers, thank you, dearie. Pity Lust couldn't have come with him, they'd had some fine times together and would again, but Gluttony is philosophic,





## LUST

seldom alone for long in any event. He loosens his food-stained jacket and sighs, remembering the holiday when he had been joined at table by a pure walking-stick of a lady, a bag of bones. She'd matched him caviar for caviar, lobster for lobster, through seas of hollandaise, bearnaise, maitaise, medallions of veal sauce madere, mountains of pommes duchesse, soufflé after soufflé, savories, a thousand wines, meal after meal; Lust had been along that time and, fascinated by her capacity within that skeletal frame, had taken her off between

meals for his own uses. The secret was the damn lady had gone and taken a tapeworm in a capsule, could eat anything and never put on an ounce. Of course, tempting as it was, and Gluttony shifted his massive flab from one bursting buttock to the other (and it *was* tempting, he was still juggling the pros and cons), the damn parasite eventually got to your brain . . . not much fun then. Gluttony nods, dozes in a dream of detraining in Venice, working his way back across the continent through fields of pasta, white truffles in season now, Verdicchio, fritto misto,

Chianti, gnocchi, cantharides, zuppa inglese, taking ship at Genoa for Tunis (briks!) on to Algeria (couscous and kif!), and Morocco (bstila, Gris de Boulaoune, m'joud!), then up to Spain. A dubious paella had once put him in an Andorran clinic for a few days of intravenous fasting, but they'd been more than accommodating about adding a bit of heroin to it, and he hadn't truly suffered. Then Toulouse for baths of cassoulets, a short divergence down to Marseille for bouillabaise in the Vieux Port

and other kinds of tastes at the private club on the Cannebiere between meals; no, this time he wouldn't get off the Blue Train for Vienne, old Pointe was long gone so what was the use? He'd make do overnight and in Paris go to earth on the Ile de la Cité, resting up for a few hours on snails and Sancerre before . . . yes, yes, as a lad he'd always sought out *only* the greatest joys and comforts, and now in his maturity he seeks out the *only* joys and comforts, harder and harder to find. He stirs uneasily in his snooze as he enters his recurrent nightmare, which is not of empty plate and glass at all, but of so much more to come that he cannot consume it.

But back to the Gentleman Detective, who has paused at his small, elegant house in the mews to pick up a weekend suitcase from his manservant and move on to the station to take train, not for foreign parts but for a quiet Friday to Monday in a Stately Home in the country.

His most likely companion in his compartment will be **Anger**, traveling with deadly weapons: golf clubs, tennis racquet, cricket bat, shotgun, and shooting stick. Seated across from the Gentleman Detective, his back to the

## GLUTTONY



**ANGER**

engine and furious about it, he pops soda mints into his mouth; grinding his dentures audibly. Anger holds the *Times* in hands terminating in chewed fingernails; his wristwatch sports a highly visible sweep hand. Anger bears with him a faint scent of burning fuse and a chip on his shoulder of such weight he is thrown off balance easily, and carries a cane which he uses ruthlessly to jostle his way through clots of people

and other barriers.

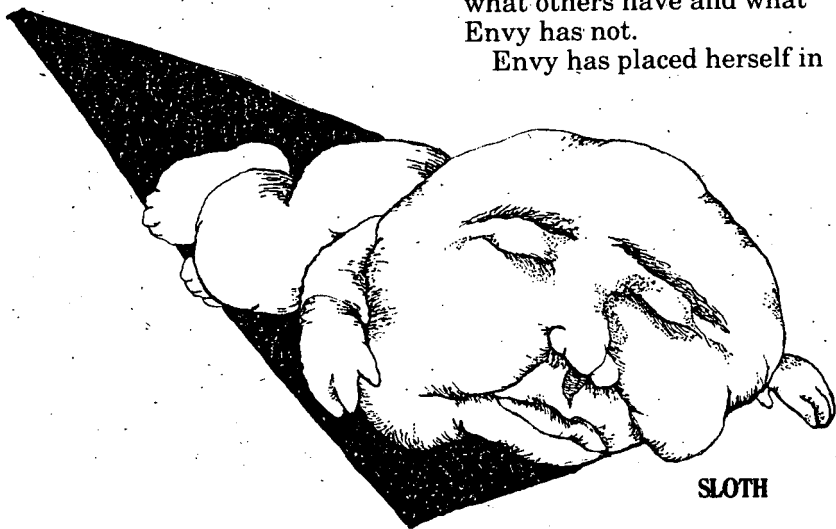
Anger may well be traveling with, even married to, **Sloth**: she has forgotten to pack her thyroid pills and her hair is coming down, scattering dandruff on sloping shoulders. The train's movement is soporific, and she cannot remember whether she put the porridge pan to soak day before yesterday. Probably not. This evening there will be the river and the canoe to float in; perhaps she

can borrow sandals, it had been too much effort to find and pack her own. A pity to leave home, really, the dandelions on her lawn were so pretty. Still, she can get through the weekend if not asked to make a fourth at bridge, come down for breakfast, score for the others at billiards, or participate in croquet. There'd been a nice hammock under the willow tree, last time. But then it made Anger so tiresomely cross if she simply rested, indeed everything made him cross these days, quite impossible to please, if she had any self-respect she'd leave him, but the trouble

that would take! Far simpler to substitute ordinary aspirin for his heart-attack pills. One day she might even get around to doing it . . . would it be worth the effort? The train jerks to a halt, she wakes, they have arrived, it would have been so nice to have missed the stop and just ride on and on and on. . . .

Envy is, ordinarily, *there*. In place, rooted. Not for Envy the dragonfly-flittings about of her betters; when Envy goes up to Town for The Sales once a year, she prefers the lumbering leisure of an omnibus to the swift but less revealing Underground; from the top of a bus one can see what others have and what Envy has not.

Envy has placed herself in



**SLOTH**



## ENVY

subordinate positions and is obliged to meet trains in rainy weather, clean the household birdcage, spend glorious spring mornings counting napkins in a dark pantry, seeing to the linen room, untangling dress hangers in gloomy guest room closets for the House Party that is arriving.

Envy possesses a truly foul recipe for Turkish Delight which she packages up (in ironed tissue paper) as little

delicacies and dispenses as Christmas and birthday gifts. Inhabiting a hall bedroom, she peers from the only window through her great-aunt's chipped opera glasses at the goings-on behind the nuttery. Envy is a mouse, nibbling ratlike until fine velvet is cheesecloth, and wears knotted shoestrings, laddered stockings, and raveled cardigans. The elastic in her hairnet is loose. Envy collects grievances, suffers

from post nasal drip and allergy to cats, and is heard most often declining with "Oh, *me?* No, no thank you, I mustn't," whether offered pressed duck or a cabin on the yacht. Pressured into acceptance, she is brought very akin to Anger, for without her afflictions, who would she be? She has, after all, her Pride. Toadying to Avarice is second nature, as is impatience with Gluttony, oblivion of Lust, and exasperation with Sloth.

**S**o the villains are assembled for the performance, which will be, of course, murder . . . of one, perhaps, by one for certain. It is well for the reader to bear in mind, as does the Gentleman Detective, that *how* the murder was done tells much.

Pride kills at a remove, aping humility at times. Pride nudges with his elbow a heavy urn from a battlement or gallery to fall on the victim, or mails a letter bomb, manages defenestration with the blunt end of a pikestaff pulled from the wall.

Sloth forgets, finds it too much trouble to tell the victim the brakes on the Lagonda are out of order, too strenuous to wake at night to give the patient the medicine,

too boring to make haste for help when someone is drowning in quicksand.

Anger does the job quickly with any instrument, blunt or not, at hand, detonated at last from a long, slow burn or at the unbearable and immediate insult. In either case, Anger simultaneously arranges an alibi. Anger specializes in "accidents": hit and run, revengeful bashings, gunshots.

Envy prepares a septic hatpin, an air bubble injection, small and slow doses of poison, and often goes down to destruction with the victim.

Gluttony, called from table, tends to strangling, hanging, garroting, throat slitting, and caustic swift poison.

Lust feeds fires, furnaces, explosions, and is adept at electrocution.

Avarice specializes in burial alive, bodies in wells, unrecovered victims of drownings, and so forth (Avarice might want the corpse later for some arcane reason; waste not, want not!); and also organizes "suicides" because of financial ruin.

But whatever the means, remember that The Seven Deadly Sins are, ultimately, deadlier to their own souls than to those of their victims.

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

Illustration by Sheila Smith



**F**rances and Richard Lockridge are the creators of the mystery series starring a sleuthing couple named Pam and Jerry North. The Norths first appeared in the thirties and continued for years thereafter, and I always think of their adventures in terms of their showcase: New York City and, most often, its literary community. (Jerry North is owner of a publishing firm.) Pocket Books has been reprinting these novels, and if you haven't picked one up yet, you can try **Death of an Angel** (\$2.95, 223 pp.). In addition to scenes in the Algonquin Hotel, the ubiquitous cocktail hours, and other colorful glimpses of latter-day society in the Big Apple, *Death of an Angel* offers lots of behind-the-scenes action of a smash Broadway play. And, as always, there's the delightful presence of the Norths themselves, always urbane and usually too clever for their own good.

From a British author, Sheila Radley, comes an assured English-village mystery. **The Quiet Road to Death** (Penguin Books, \$3.50, 190 pp.) features Detective Chief Inspector Doug Quantrill. He attributes his recent crotchiness to the sluggishness of his current ongoing investigation of a headless female corpse dumped in his district. Until the village harridan was threatened by the decapitation of her cat, there were no clues. But Quantrill's smug wife Molly maintains that the source of her husband's bad humor is that he's losing a colleague, a pretty young female constable who



has shocked him by falling in love with—and subsequently marrying—Quantrill's superior officer (who's older than Quantrill!). The plot is tightly structured, and Quantrill's old infatuation—and his growing new one for a recently transferred female colleague—make a pleasant counterpoint to death.

Ed McBain is out in paperback now with **Lightning** (Avon Books, \$3.95, 312 pp.). It features the old gang at the 87th Precinct, and weaves (and so deftly!) several threads: a repeat rapist's activities come to light as the precinct crew seeks a killer who is hanging coeds' corpses from lampposts around town. This one reads like lightning, and concludes with an ominous note from the group's old nemesis, the Deaf Man, foreshadowing McBain's latest in hard-cover, *Eight Black Horses* (recently reviewed in this space).

Sharing the same urban setting (although little else) is Michael Wolk's **The Big Picture** (Signet, \$2.95, 251 pp.). Max Popper is a starving literary agent who stays afloat writing pseudonymous soft-core porn novels—none of which prepares him for the hysterical and harrowing adventures that follow his unwitting ensnarement in a blackmail scheme perpetrated by his sleazy office neighbor. This is lively fun for adults who appreciate a wicked sense of humor.

Velda Johnston's credits include more than two dozen novels of suspense, and I've no doubt her fans are legion. Not one of them will be disappointed with her latest, either. **The Crystal Cat** (Dodd, Mead, \$14.95, 192 pp.) has at its center a very sympathetic heroine (a Johnston trademark) who narrates her own harrowing tale of her storybook marriage after a whirlwind Venetian romance—and her subsequent anguish once the couple returns home. "Home," you see, is the small New England town where the heroine was born and where her mother was drowned twenty years ago. It is also home to a very ancient evil, and the young bride's appearance awakens the horror. This is a sure-footed gothic that should earn Johnston an even larger audience.

On a lighter note (pun fully intended) is Dorothy Cannell's **The Thin Woman**, subtitled "An Epicurean Mystery" (Penguin, \$3.50, 242 pp.). Ellie Simons is the heroine/narrator of this tale, a first novel set in Britain that delectably combines a big-stakes treasure hunt, a romance worthy of the "screwball comedy" films of the thirties—and murder. To earn an inheritance from an eccentric uncle, Ellie must lose sixty-three pounds; her fiancé (whom she actually "rented" from an escort service) must write a publishable

novel without using a single dirty word; and both of them must stay alive long enough to see the wager period out. This is fresh and lots of fun, with a bracingly robust heroine, an infuriating but dashing hero, and a couple of neat plot twists in the bargain. If only dieting were as much fun as reading about Ellie's. . . . Still, you'll not find a more delicious non-caloric treat than *The Thin Woman*.

Masako Togawa is a critically acclaimed Japanese writer; **The Master Key** (Dodd, Mead, \$13.95, 198 pp.) marks her debut in America. It's a deceptively quiet novel (tautly translated by Simon Grove) set in a respectable Tokyo hotel for women. This hotel is a claustrophobic world unto itself, masking loneliness, hidden passions, and dead dreams (as well as the corpse of a long-dead child), disguising envy as righteousness and secrecy as privacy. The theft of a master key that can open any door threatens all the long-time tenants with exposure—and all that would mean. Togawa is reminiscent of Ruth Rendell in her talent for painting the dark secrets of the human heart so clearly, and for illuminating them for what they are—sad and ominous simultaneously.

Author S.T. Haymon is quickly building a reputation as a British mystery writer of note. **Stately Homicide** (St. Martin's, \$11.95, 250 pp.) is the third novel to feature Detective-Inspector Ben Jurnet of Norfolk. The title refers to the death of a new curator of Bullen Hall, an estate home and library that's been opened to the public and turned into a tourist attraction complete with resident craftsmen selling their wares and with guided tours throughout the home and its complex. Jurnet's creator follows in the footsteps of P.D. James and her ilk, using a quiet and decent detective as the centerpiece in a compelling tale of psychological suspense and murder. An age-old tradition (some might say "curse") that dates back to the time of Anne Boleyn still haunts the present-day family members, while a more contemporary motive burns in the breast of a coldblooded murderer. This is for the sophisticated reader, one mature enough to appreciate Haymon's web of misguided and misplaced love.

Need a cure for insomnia? Sorry, I don't have one. What I *do* have, however, are two suggestions for bedtime reading. That way, even if you can't sleep, you can keep yourself entertained. **The Deadly Arts**, subtitled "A Collection of Artful Suspense" by editors Bill Pronzini and Marcia Muller, is a collection of more than two dozen short stories, each dealing with some aspect of the arts. In

addition to works by such authors as Stanley Ellin, Ron Goulart, and Julian Symons—to name but three from a stellar cast—there are tales about TV newscasting and jazz clubs and cartoon writers and more. The inclusion of such solid writers, and the theme of the arts, make this well worth the money. (Arbor House, \$15.95, 313 pp.)

Another anthology by the same publisher is **The Arbor House Treasury of True Crime**, by John Dunning, with an introduction by Colin Wilson (\$18.95, 476 pp.). What Dunning has done is novelistically tell the true stories behind thirty murder cases, using as his perspective the viewpoint of the investigating officer. These are twentieth century murders, replete with characters, plots, and motives that can equal most novels . . . stranger than fiction. Not for the weak of heart, nor those with weak stomachs, either. It is for those readers who, like Colin Wilson, are fascinated by “patterns of murder.”

William Marshall’s “Yellowthread Street Mystery” series was the subject of a profile in this column some months back. I’m always gratified to mention a new title by a past profile subject; and I’m further gratified to be able to report that Marshall gets better with every book. **The Far Away Man** (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, \$14.95, 186 pp.) is the latest to come out, and it’s a real spellbinder. Detective Chief Inspector Harry Feiffer and his team work on several puzzling investigations under a scorching sun that sometimes threatens to blow up an already tense neighborhood in a seedy section of Hong Kong. Marshall’s staccato style punches with the speed and force of an automatic weapon; quirky comedy scenes are in counterpoint to the handiwork of a grim-visaged assassin. One begins to see a tracing of a pattern, but the revelations of the final scene are almost too horrible to accept. This is a powerful novel, wickedly witty, devastatingly plotted.

# THE STORY THAT WON

Arthur Tress



The November Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Patricia Hagen of Midland, Texas. Honorable mentions go to John Creger of Lakewood, California; Toni Swan of Fort Gibson, Oklahoma; Jacqueline Martin of Columbia, South Carolina; Erica Frances Obey of Brooklyn, New York; William F. Smith of Garden Grove, California; H. P. Stabitz of Markham, Ontario, Canada; Larry Sayles of Irving, Texas; Mervin W. Hart of Kilgore, Texas; Louis Anthony Gialloreto of Colwyn, Pennsylvania; J. A. Nelson of Norquay, Saskatchewan, Canada; and Mary Elizabeth Galbraith of Seattle, Washington.

## MESSENGER OF THE GODDESS by Patricia Hagen

"Someone must have it in for the government because this is the third government building that has been bombed in three months," said Detective Williams as he and Patrolman Grady stood on the wharf and surveyed the damage.

"The only thing standing is that statue of a guy with wings on his hat. He must have been put there after the explosion, for everything else is rubble," Grady observed.

"I agree," said Detective Williams. "That's Mercury, messenger of the gods."

"What god is he delivering this message for?" Grady wanted to know. "There aren't any gods around here."

"Oh, I don't know; there's King Neptune's Seafood, Apollo's Gym, the Vulcan Steel Company, and more I haven't heard of, I'm sure."

"Did this Mercury deliver messages only for the gods?" Grady asked.

"What do you mean?" the detective questioned.

Grady pointed to a beautiful yacht gliding out of the harbor. The words "Sea Goddess" were emblazoned on its side.

The puzzled expression left Detective Williams' face and was replaced with a smile. "That's our man, or woman, rather. The owner of the *Sea Goddess* is Diana Winslow. The Feds sent her up on a drug charge several years ago; she was released just before the first bombing. Diana, the Roman goddess of the moon and the hunt, sent us a message by Mercury, and we'll have to give her a reply by police. Let's get that yacht intercepted!"

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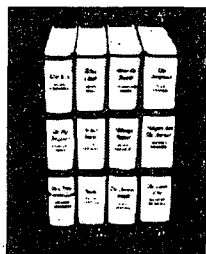
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